THRILLING

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OCT. 25¢

FEATURING:

THE BIRD OF TIME

By Wallace West

SCIENCE FICTION
BY TOP WRITERS

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

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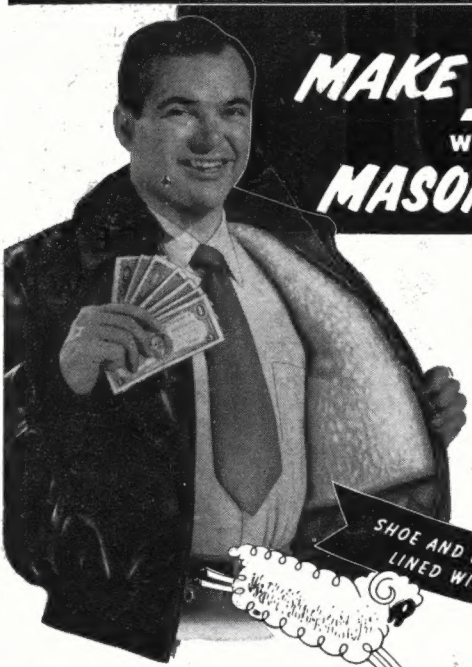

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DEPT. MA-46
Chippewa Falls, Wisc.

SEND FOR FREE OUTFIT!

Mr. Ned Mason, Dept. MA-46
MASON SHOE MFG. COMPANY,
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You bet I want to start my own **extra-income** business! Please rush FREE and postpaid my Powerful Selling Outfit—featuring Mason Jackets, Air-Cushion Shoes, other fast-selling specialties—so I can start making BIG MONEY right away!

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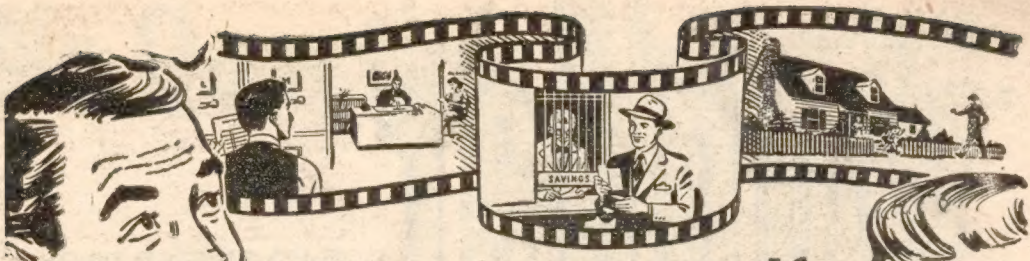

Picture yourself going places

You've done it often. Call it day-dreaming if you like, but you've seen yourself in a bigger job — giving orders and making decisions — driving off in a smart new car — buying your family a fine home.

There's nothing wrong with dreams. But how about making them come true? *You can do it,* if you're willing to try!

Look around you. The men who are going places are the *trained* men. They've learned special skills that bring them better jobs and higher pay. It's the men *without* training whose dreams never come true.

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2. I want a good time.
3. I don't want any responsibility.
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5. I haven't enough education.
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THRILLING
wonder STORIES

VOL. XLI, NO. 1 A THRILLING PUBLICATION OCTOBER, 1952

A NOVEL

THE BIRD OF TIME.....Wallace West 10
He didn't want a four-sided honeymoon and a share-the-bride arrangement, but when on Mars, it was best to do as the Martians did

TWO NOVELETS

THE KOKOD WARRIORS.....Jack Vance 60
Magnus Ridolph was hired to stop the gambling racket at Shadow Valley Inn, where men made big wagers on war in miniature

THE POLLUXIAN PRETENDER.....Kendell Foster Crossen 90
When Manning Draco took a little run up to Pollux to spring a client, his business trip zoomed into a surprising emotional mix-up

SHORT STORIES

FOOL'S ERRAND.....Paul Lawrence Payne 82
They argued all the way to Mars—and there each found his proof

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS TO COME.....William Ratigan 116
They stepped backward in order to go forward

THE REASONABLE PEOPLE.....Roger Dee 120
Vanity's name is woman—insanity's name is man!

FEATURES

THE READER SPEAKS *(Letters and Comment)*.....The Editor 6
WHAT'S NEW IN SCIENCE?.....Facts and Oddities 9
EARTHS OF OTHER SUNS.....James Blish 56
THE FRYING PAN.....Jerome Bixby 141
SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW.....A Department 143

Cover Painting by EARLE K. BERGEY

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SAMUEL MINES, *Editor*

THRILLING WONDER STORIES. Published every other month by STANDARD MAGAZINES, INC., 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Copyright, 1952, by Standard Magazines, Inc. Subscription (12 issues), $3.00; single copies, 25c. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. Re-entered as second-class matter October 8, 1946, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of March 3, 1879. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes and are submitted at the author's risk. In corresponding with this publication, please include your postal zone number, if any. October, 1952. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

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A DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE FICTION FANS

TRS pauses in its own hectic dash toward the stars to say a word about a brand new magazine which is joining the terrible twins. SPACE STORIES makes its bow this month, October, with its first issue.

Not designed to compete with SS and TWS, SPACE STORIES will supplement them to round out the full variety we have endeavoured to bring you in the science-fiction field. As you are doubtless aware, the chief difference between SS and TWS is in the lengths of stories offered. SS has generally featured the long novel and a novelet, TWS two short novels and a novelet. As to quality, we have been working to push it up all the time, and we have belabored the point before now that we try to achieve both good science and good drama in all the stories we publish.

In SPACE STORIES the emphasis will be frankly on action. The cerebral type of story which is welcome in both SS and TWS is not likely to see the light of publication there. The slant is for those who crave good hot space opera; it is in a sense an answer to those fans who have been bewailing the passing of the good old-time kind of story. If you are one of these, SPACE STORIES is your dish. If you like all kinds, you will find the red-blooded virile kind in SPACE STORIES, while the twins will continue to cover all types.

As to frequency, SPACE STORIES will appear every other month, like TWS and FSM; the price will be two bits, the editor the same as now inflicted upon you in the rest of the group. We think, with our usual modesty, that this makes the Thrilling group the biggest, best-balanced and most varied source of science fiction available today. Don't take our word for it; ask Captain Slater, esteemed British fan who trains a gimlet and appraising eye upon all the prozines.

Our Cover Changes

Reactions have been coming in to the cover changes on SS and TWS. We didn't ballyhoo them much in advance—some fans even complained about that, muttering crossly that all we had done was mention casually there would be a change, and thus leaving them unprepared for the magnitude of the change. But we have since been inundated with letters; most of them pure screams of joy. True, a modernization was overdue—type, format, logo and so on—and this is all to the good. Also, we have resisted any temptation to go digest size and there are good reasons for this. For one thing you get a better cover and a better picture in the larger size. Second, inside the magazine you get bigger, easier-to-read type and also bigger and better illustrations because of the larger size. More than one reader has mentioned to us that he is going blind reading certain digest-sized magazines, and with blind readers, what happens to circulation? On the whole we believe there is more reader comfort in a bigger magazine.

Apart from the modernization of cover layouts, there has been a great and perhaps little-understood improvement in the art work itself. Dig out some of your old copies and compare the Bergey of five years ago—one year ago—with the Bergey of today. Some readers couldn't believe this was really Bergey, thought we'd rung in a new artist altogether.

A particular favorite of our own is the August cover of TWS. The gal, you'll notice, is covered right up to the neck (a switch)

(Continued on page 129)

WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?

Benjamin Franklin
(A Rosicrucian)

WHY was this man great? How does anyone—man or woman—achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

Know the mysterious world within you! Attune yourself to the wisdom of the ages! Grasp the inner power of your mind! Learn the secrets of a full and peaceful life! Benjamin Franklin—like many other learned and great men and women—was a Rosicrucian. The Rosicrucians (NOT a religious organization) first came to America in 1694. Today, headquarters of the Rosicrucians send over seven million pieces of mail annually to all parts of the world.

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The money is all yours—for any purpose you want to use it. There are no hidden meanings or big words in the policy. We urge you and every family and also individuals to send for this policy on our 10 day free trial offer—and be convinced that no other hospital plan offers you so much for your $1.00 a month!

TWO SPECIAL FEATURES

MATERNITY
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Women who will some day have babies will want to take advantage of a special low cost maternity rider. Pays $50.00 for childbirth confinement either in the hospital or at home, after policy has been in force 10 months. Double the amount on twins.

POLIO
Benefits At No Extra Cost
In lieu of other regular benefits policy pays these benefits if polio strikes—
For Hospital Bills, up to $500.00
For Doctor's Bills while in the hospital, up to $500.00
For Orthopedic Appliances, up to $500.00
TOTAL OF $1,500.00

3c A DAY IS ALL YOU PAY
for this outstanding new Family Protection

Wonderful news! This new policy covers everyone from infancy to age 70! When sickness or accident sends you or a member of your family to the hospital—this policy PAYS $100.00 PER WEEK for a day, a month, even a year . . . or just as long as you stay in the hospital. What a wonderful feeling to know your savings are protected and you won't have to go into debt. The money is paid DIRECT TO YOU to spend as you wish. This remarkable new Family Hospital Protection costs only 3c a day for each adult 18 to 59 years of age, and for age 60 to 70 only 4½c a day. This policy even covers children up to 18 years of age with cash benefits of $50.00 a week while in the hospital—yet the cost is only 1½c a day for each child! Benefits paid while confined to any recognized hospital, except government hospitals, rest homes and clinics, spas or sanitariums. Pick your own doctor. Naturally this wonderful policy is issued only to individuals and families now in good health; otherwise the cost would be sky high. But once protected, you are covered for about every sickness or accident. Persons covered may return as often as necessary to the hospital within the year.

This is What $100.00 a Week Can Mean to You When in the Hospital for Sickness or Accident

Money melts away fast when you or a member of your family has to go to the hospital. You have to pay costly hospital board and room . . . doctor's bills and maybe the surgeon's bill too . . . necessary medicines, operating room fees—a thousand and one things you don't count on. What a Godsend this READY CASH BENEFIT WILL BE TO YOU. Here's cash to go a long way toward paying heavy hospital expenses—and the money left over can help pay you for time lost from your job or business. Remember—all cash benefits are paid directly to you.

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REMEMBER—$100.00 A WEEK CASH BENEFIT IS ACTUALLY $14.25 PER DAY!

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The Actual Policy Will Come to You at Once Without Cost or Obligation

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Please rush the new Family Hospital Protection Plan Policy to me on 10 days Free Inspection. I understand that I am under no obligation.

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City or Town.....*State*.....

SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
Assets of $13,188,604.16 as of January 1, 1951
Hospital Department H-17, Omaha 2, Nebraska

What's New in Science?

HIS "HEADQUARTERS" WERE on a remote planet. He was a true "Master of the Universe, using spaceships to conquer and destroy enemy planets and even whole solar systems."

The case of Tommy, "the space child," was recently reported to the American Psychiatric Association. As a result of early childhood frustrations and feelings of hostility toward his real environment, Tommy created a strange dream world of his own, light years away, and in it he lived for years as its Master, completely indifferent to our Earth about him. In a new method called "distance" analysis, Tommy was gradually brought back mentally from planet to planet, finally to "land on Earth" fully recovered from his fantasies.

Or were they fantasies?

MATTER WHICH LASTS ONLY from one ten-millionth of a second to one ten-billionth of a second may become a new source of intense atomic energy. Positronium is composed of the simplest atom yet discovered, made by pairing up a positron with a negatively charged electron. Its life is so short that it can be determined only by measuring the amount of its gamma output. The existence of positronium was deduced in theory fifteen years ago, but Dr. Martin Deutsch of M. I. T. is the first to work with it experimentally.

TIT FOR TAT IS FAIR PLAY: insects have always killed plants; now plants are killing insects. Not gobbling them up, like the time-honored Venus Fly-trap, either—these plants do it with their own natural-born sap, carefully poisoned so that the plant itself is not injured but the juice is a lethal mickey for any thirsty bug that happens along. New phosphorus compounds are this answer to a farmer's dream, some of them so highly selective that the plant's sap kills injurious chew-and-sucking bugs but will not harm beneficial ones! Perhaps the next step will be to poison the human blood-stream once over lightly—just enough so that one nip of our juice will send a mosquito to happy-land.

RADIOACTIVE DUST HAS BEEN FOUND on wood-samples dug up from old Egyptian tombs . . . but don't get excited: the "hot" dust settled on the specimens only recently while they were in the possession of Dr. W. F. Libby of Chicago, not centuries ago when they belonged to the Pharaohs. And Dr. Libby is very unhappy about the whole thing. For he is the man who determines the age of things by measuring the radioactivity still contained in them, and, unbelievable as it seems, the atomic bomb explosions in Nevada are kicking up enough radioactive "dirt" to drift to Chicago, settle on his specimens, and louse up his computations! Of course, the "dirt" is drifting to lots of other places, too . . . how about it, Atomic Energy Commission? Floods? Tornadoes? Crazy weather? Let's have a correlation on this.

ETA CARINA IS FLARING up again. You don't know the lady? She a star, rather well known for temperament. Every so often Eta Carina blows her top. The last explosion was about a hundred years ago; the first recorded eruption was in 142 A.D. If she follows her usual pattern she may grow to a brilliance equal to the brightest star in the sky, then subside for a cooling off period again.

DO YOU LOVE your grandmother? According to a survey made at the University of Nebraska, grandma does best if she refuses to retire to the old rocking chair, but remains as modern as her grandchildren. 107 coeds have answered a questionaire in which they reveal that they like grandma if she does not become querulous and wrapped up in her own troubles, but remains considerate of others, helpful, refrains from constant criticism, nagging and interference, does not snoop, does not try to take over and run other peoples lives, but offers advice and guidance only when asked.

Sounds like someone's ideal blueprint for the perfect grandma.

FULL COLOR PHOTOS can now be sent by wire or radio in a single transmission instead of three or four, as the result of a patent issued to Harold Carlson, Westchester, N. Y., inventor. The former system broke a color print down into its primary colors, necessitating three prints and possibly a fourth for black. Each color was then sent individually. The result was usually distortion. Now two photo-electric eyes scan the picture simultaneously, one reacting to the density or tone of color, the other to the density or tone of an area, regardless of color. The result is instantaneous reproduction in full color.

He didn't want a four-sided honeymoon and a share-the-bride arrangement . . . but when on Mars, do as the Martians do. . . .

The BIRD of TIME

I

AS THE long, low light of sunset washed through the plastic roof of the Agan Theatredrome, a princess sat among the purple shadows of her preening room and shed two precious tears. Scarlet wings drooping until their tips brushed the gold inlaid floor; an untouched pipe of Gurlak cooling and curdling on its golden tripod before her, Yahna was bemoaning that cruel fate which insists on marrying young royalty against its will.

It wasn't sharing the nesthold with another female that disturbed her. Awoni was charming and intuitive, even though she had no wings and was a 'vision addict.

As for Kawl, the princess had adored

A Novel by WALLACE WEST

the big brute ever since she had sprouted pinfeathers—his basso profundo, a thing almost unheard of—his fierce litheness, evoking tingling mental images of what males must have been when they too could fly—even his stoic suffering whenever he broke a leg sandskiing.

No, it was Pitaret Mura, her prime spouse-to-be, who sang flat in the quartet. Mura, whose wing scars turned a ghastly white whenever he became angry with her, which was often—Mura, who made Awoni and Kawl swoon with love, but who filled Yahna with distrust in spite of his charm and telepathic genius—Mura, who was *such* a good perch. If only he were not *such* a pretentiously humble servant of the Anarchiate. If only he were not so overpowering. If only he were not so . . . so basically stupid!

Yahna, last of a Line of Flight stretching back to The Dawn, dropped two more tears (which she should have been saving for tomorrow) upon her gold-sandalled toes.

"Sauk," (Her coloratura could charm relefs out of the canal rushes.) "were you ever in love?"

"Twice once," her preener answered in a soothing alto. "Once twice. Never thrice. Wouldn't wed."

"But you are not of The Line," Yahna sang. The Line! That thin chain of living fossils who had bred true through the millenia while the main branch of the Martian race was regaining its sanity and losing its wings.

"Why should I help hold The Line?" she continued to fret. "Who wants to fly, anyway, under a pressurized coop?"

LITTLE SAUK was answering long before the princess finished. Their voices made exquisite harmony as she protested: "Nature's laws must be obeyed."

"Nature's laws!" Yahna hit a High C in her exasperation. She was well acquainted with the argument that her race had reverted to barbarism and fallen under the insane influence of the Avron because it had disobeyed genetic laws by intermarrying with an alien race.

"We have had a second chance, something Nature seldom grants her children. We must never fail again, though each princess have a *thrice*-loveless marriage!"

"You're so matter-of-factual you must think love's unnatural!" Yahna snipped.

Sauk drew in her breath with a hiss of pure agony.

"Child! Child!" she chirped. "How often must I tell you it is bad taste to make rhymes? A girl in your position can't afford to be ill-bred."

"But it's all right for her to make a stupid marriage!" Yahna fluttered her wings, half in anger, half in despair at her preener's conventionality. "Get me new Gurlak, please, will you, Sauk?" she added. "Mura is coming to see me tonight," and she rhymed defiantly, "I may survive if I get a bit tight."

Sauk fled, shaking her old head and trying to hide a smile.

Alone in the little room with its chaste Ionic columns and ceiling apparently open to the evening sky, Yahna began limbering up for The Ritual. She rose on tiptoe and, slim as a lance, stretched her wings until they touched the clear plastic ten feet above. She beat them together like flames until the chamber roared with air currents and she was forced to take graceful backward and forward hops to keep her balance. Then, folding those pinions until they clung like caresses to every sweet line of her body, she moved to a bar along the wall and engaged in bending and stretching exercise that would have caused a human toe dancer to blush with shame for sheer awkwardness.

By the time Sauk returned, the princess was half-intoxicated from the oxygen which the violent exercise had driven into her lungs. She waved the Gurlak pipe aside, stepped out on the balcony that encircled the underground auditorium and sounded the piercing me-

lodious rallying call.

From adjoining rooms eleven other living myths appeared on the translucent ledge. Together they spread wings that ranged from pink to a scarlet just a shade less brilliant than Yahna's own. It was the old salute to thousands of groundling Martians who filled the auditorium, sipping their first drinks of the day, dining frugally and waiting for The Ritual.

So it had been on every eventide for ages.

The flyers, in telepathic contact now, needed no further vocal signals from the princess. In unison they sprang into the air and began the majestic evolutions constituting the only religious ceremony extant on Mars. Their massed flight, accompanied by occasional songs and drifting instrumental music, was sheer poetry in motion and sound, exquisite as the memory of a dream.

They continued, without repetition of figures, until Deimos rose to supplant the dying twilight with its dim glow. Sitting in the rarified dehydrated air beneath an invisible barrier, the audience watched, enthralled, always remembering, at decent intervals, to shed twin ceremonial tears for past glories —tears that dried almost instantly on their ruddy, upturned faces.

AS THE climax of the "show," as she bitterly insisted on calling it, Yahna did her solo number—the long, slow, fluttering Fall From Grace that had made her famous. Down she came, screaming, from the very top of the dome, feathers in flaming disarray, arms and legs flailing—a bird winged by the hunter. Just as it seemed she must crash into the audience she landed, poised and vibrant, on the gossamer balcony and lifted her wings in response to thunderous plaudits.

"Georgeous . . . as usual," came the possessively admiring thought as she stumbled, half-dazed, into the preening room. "No one who has seen you fly can ever doubt that Mars still is destined to inherit the Galaxy."

"Oh, Mura!" Her gesture of distaste went unnoticed as she was warmly wrapped in a robe held by the Pitaret. "You don't believe a word of that nonsense."

He cocked his sleek head and licked his lips with a pointed, scarlet tongue.

"What does it matter what I believe? The point is that *you* believe. And Yahna's belief can bridge space."

"I wish you would be serious, Mura."

"So you could be stupid?" he mocked her mentally. "No, my fledge. You may act like a spoiled child before others but

Backward, O Time!

FAITHFUL readers will recognize the Princess Yahna from LURE OF POLARIS and thereby deduce correctly that Mr. West is doing something very much like a series. This indeed he is, but unlike a conventional series THE BIRD OF TIME does not follow LURE OF POLARIS chronologically. Instead it precedes it in time. Also, Mr. West informs me that the next story in the series will precede BIRD. This wholly novel manner of writing a series backward intrigues us and our appreciation of the fact was in no wise spoiled by author West's assurance that it wasn't planned that way. "It just happened that way," he said, untroubled by it all.

Backward or forward, these are delightful, witty tales. And if there is a bit of a stinger concealed under the feathery badinage that too is the essence of humor, isn't it?

—The Editor

Mura knows you have a fine head on those pretty shoulders. If only you would use it as you do your wings."

"Do get me a hot Gurlak," she pleaded, sitting down at the golden preening table.

"My dear, I kiss your sacred wing tips." (In thought he *did* kiss her wing tips while she reacted prettily. She was careful not to project *her* thought: That Mura was a presumptuous egomaniac not worthy of kissing her twelfth toe!) "I also," the Pitaret rattled on mentally, "realize that Princess Yahna is an *artiste*, as the humans would say, whose every whim must be granted, even to supplying Gurlak that she never drinks. However, I bring news more stimulating than liquid. He touched his forehead with a forefinger in respect to the last word, or, more correctly, in respect to the *concept* of liquid that flicked through his mind.

"????" She had busied herself with the cosmetics in their golden flasks.

"We are to be reinforced by Terrestrials."

Yahna trilled with surprise.

"What would poor old dying Mars do without my telepathic powers?" he preened himself. "The second ship from Earth will land near here tomorrow. Duodecuple days behind it come three much larger rockets that make up the Second Expedition. Tomorrow's arrival is small and carries only two men. They are in suspended animation still, so I can't read their minds clearly. I do know they were both members of the First Expedition that came here two years ago; that their present trip was not authorized by any Earth government and that they are driven by a boundless cupidity."

"Why tell me this?" She was applying cold flame to her fingernails with exaggerated care.

"Why? Because you are an angel." He studied her bowed head quizzically.

"What's an angel?"

"According to a dictionary I examined while I was playing my role of gook servant to Captain Brown of the First Expedition, an angel is 'a superior being, usually a winged messenger.' In fact, of course, angels are racial memories of that old Martian attempt to colonize Earth. But Terrestrials don't know that. Brown and his crew didn't get underground, you remember, and they met only wingless, apparently primitive Martians. I saw to that!"

"So you want me to beguile the creatures who arrive tomorrow, keep them from finding out too much about us and discover what designs upon us they, and the Second Expedition, may have? I'm afraid you overrate my abilities."

"Nonsense. That thought itself proves you are very clever indeed. Also, any human will fall violently in love with you at sight. That's the way the nasty things are. Why two years ago they went absolutely wild about *wingless* girls they met. We had the Avron's own time with them."

"With the girls?" Yahna glanced at him out of the corner of her golden eyes.

"Well, not too much," he answered seriously. "Most girls found the monogamous mating habits of the humans revolting."

"I should think so!" She rustled her plumage in distaste.

"But returning to your original question. I know pretty well what designs our visitors have on us."

"Conquest . . . ?"

YAHNA rebuked him. "Don't be Martian! Humans are always 'out after the almighty dollar,' as they express it so beautifully. Recently they have found out that military conquest has never paid dividends throughout their entire history. So they have formally denounced and abandoned it. No, my little relef, our Terrestrial cousins come as peaceful traders." He shadowed the final adjective.

"Why, that's wonderful!" She clapped her flame-tipped hands. "Then maybe they'll bring us jewels and other pretty

things. I'm *so* tired of gold, gold, gold. My mothers told me there used to be a diamond in our family but it wore out long ago."

"Yahna, my love!" Mura paced the room in annoyance. "We were speaking of affairs of state!"

"But they will bring jewels and things, won't they?" she pouted.

"If I have scanned their history correctly, they may bring nothing but junk. I tried to put a suggestion in Captain Brown's mind while I was 'serving' him, but he is so obtuse . . . so obtuse."

"Even if they do bring junk at first, they'll bring things we really need, later on, won't they?"

"Only if we virtually enslave ourselves to them in payment . . . or if we manage to deceive them again. Like all traders, they bring the cheapest possible trade goods. In exchange they will want precious things . . . things precious to them at least. Now, what is so precious that it could drive a race of traders across deep space? Once they exchanged shoddy knives and glass beads to the American Indians for the gold they use as money. They know we have some gold, so I suspect they'll try the same trick here. It shall be your privilege, as an humble servant of the Anarchiate, to help me turn their cupidity against them to the benefit of Mars. I will, of course, transfer to your mind all the things I learned about their language, customs and, ah, lack of morals."

"I'm to be a sort of royal prostitute?" She smiled wistfully.

"Oh, come now," he winked. "Don't be ill-bred!"

"Pitaret Mura!" The force of her anger made him press both hands to his temples. "I don't like what I see in your scheming mind. You are an utterly selfish, unscrupulous, completely contemptible. . . ."

A pink slip of a girl bounced into the preening room from the balcony, her arms full of cactus blossoms.

"Are you two fighting again?" she scolded cheerfully. "Do stop now and run along. Dear Kawl is outside with the sand skis. We're camping on the dunes tonight, remember? I'll put these flowers in vacuum and join you."

She shooed them briskly.

II

THE meteor-scarred little ship came in much too fast, its rockets guttering. Missing its destination by a mile, it skidded to rest on Forked Bay in a V of red dust.

A youngster with a mop of carroty hair and an oversized freckle on the side of his nose, wriggled out of the port. Staggering erect on legs that had not been exercised since he had gone under Suspenso three months previously, he leaned against the ship, retching and gasping in the thin, piercing air.

Reaching into that fetid straightjacket of a cabin, he found a tin of stewed tomatoes, hacked open the top, gulped the contents and, in true picnic tradition, dropped the can on the ground.

Approaching normal as his tissues sucked moisture and nourishment out of the vegetable, he puffed a cigarette alight . . . and cursed as it expired from lack of oxygen.

"Bill," he yelled. "Time to get up."

No answer. He groaned and crawled back into the ship. Came the sound of scuffling, more curses and several hard slaps. He reappeared, glummer than before. Slumping down on the dust-fine sand and resting his back against the ship, he stared at the long dunes washing the pale green "shores" of Syrtis Major, nibbled at the cigarette and contemplated.

Given: A devilishly clever sergeant who had been lucky enough to go—and far luckier to return—with the First Martian Expedition; a stake representing gifts from cooing bobby soxers and lonely old ladies who had admired his profile during a homecoming TV appearance; an M.I.T. scholarship from a grateful government leading to a B.S. in physical chemistry, complete with

field trip to the recently-opened Moon mines.

Given, finally, a providential meeting with Bill Newsome, First Expedition communications officer. Bill, now a correspondence school psychologist trying to straighten out kinks among the workers at an isolated mine, had been fed up and dying to get out into space again. Together, they had pulled enough strings to acquire dubious ownership of a junked but still half-way spaceworthy experimental rocket. Then, since they remembered the awe—almost the veneration—with which Martians had regarded the sparkling stone in Captain Brown's ring, they had shoveled up a cheap cargo of zirconium crystals.

The next step was obvious: Phony jewels to the Martians. Make a fat profit. Buy another cargo of trade goods. Then on out to the moons of Jupiter, or even to Pluto. Work it right and they'd come home world-famous and, better yet, millionaires!

Now, as soon as Bill came out of the suspended animation by means of which spacers conserved air, water and food on long hops. . . .

Hops! Jack scrambled to his feet and goggled at a creature that was hopping across the dunes. A welk! No, it was much too small to be Mars' only carnivore. A gook, of course. He had forgotten that, with the light gravitation, they really could move with that hopping gait.

"Hello, Earthling," sang the creature as it appeared. (A tenor, Jack noted with a shudder.) "We were expecting you at the old landing place."

"Expecting us?" He stared at the Martian with conflicting emotions—amazement that it was chanting excellent English in a sort of operatic recititive; a vague distress, as though an out-sized rooster had engaged him in conversation, and something else he couldn't put a finger on. In a dim light a nearsighted man might have mistaken the newcomer for a human. But Jack Harkness had 20-20 vision and the small but brilliant sun shone high in the sky.

"Expecting us?" he repeated stupidly as he took note of the Martian's large, free-wheeling eyes, wide, somewhat thick shoulders, and extra digits. He had forgotten that the gooks could be so handsomely ugly.

"Oh yes," caroled his welcomer, "I've been watching since you left the Moon.

'Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken.'"

"Say," blurted the Terrestrial, blue eyes widening, "you sound like Captain Brown. He was always quoting that thing by, uh, Byron, isn't it?"

"Keats," the Martian corrected.

"But . . . I . . . You. . ." To Jack, the dunes started pitching like waves on a real ocean. He grabbed at the edge of the port, missed, and sprawled on the dust.

THE Martian emitted a bell note of surprise as he bent over the fallen man, then clucked with amusement.

"You're slipping, Sergeant Harkness," he snapped in perfect imitation of Captain Brown. "Breathe! Hurry up! Breathe deeply!"

Jack gasped, spluttered and gradually returned to normal.

"What . . . happened?" he panted, sitting up groggily. "Oh, I remember now. Mars' atmosphere is short on carbon dioxide. Breathing must be a conscious act for humans who come here."

"You're all right now?"

"Yes." He stood up. "But . . . you *knew* we were coming! I thought you goo . . . you Martians had a rather low state of, uh . . . " He turned almost the color of his hair under that steady gaze.

"We manage. In fact, we've been waiting for your arrival with bated breath."

"Well, uh, that's mighty nice of you, Mr. . . ."

"Mura . . . Pitaret Mura . . . humble servant of the Anarchiate." The golden

"Do not fear me, Princess," quavered the Avron. "The real danger lies elsewhere."

eye that was surveying him at the moment didn't look in the least humble.

"Anarchiate? You mean Mars has a government?" (Psychologists with the First Expedition had surmised that the red people had lost most of their culture. It was thought they lived in primitive warrens near the half-empty canals and crawled out, on warm days, to tend their cactus crops.)

"That changes everything," he rushed on. "If you're an official, you should look at my cargo right now. It's fabulously valuable. If you can use influence, maybe we could make a deal. . . ."

"Hmmm." Mura licked his lips. "What have you brought us?"

"Uncut diamonds," Jack whispered after a stealthy look around the empty desert.

"Diamonds? What are diamonds?"

"Why, uh, precious jewels. . . The same kind you . . . it *was* you, wasn't it? . . . made such a tremendous fuss over when you saw one in Captain Brown's ring."

"But that was a . . . " Mura frowned delicately. "Do you have samples?"

"Sure." Jack dug three glittering zircons out of his pocket and unwrapped them tenderly. "These are already cut, so you may see them at their best. This red one is called a jacinth, or hyacinth —after Terrestrial flowers, you know. Matches the color of your skin, doesn't it? The colorless one is a jargon. This blue beauty is a starlite."

Mura wasn't listening. He was crooning wordlessly, both eyes focused on the stones.

"How many of these did you bring?"

"Why, uh, a few hundred . . . sunk every penny I had into them."

"Liar! You have at least a ton of them in your ship. You were planning to sell the first few as dear as possible, then reduce prices until you 'broke the market.' Right?"

"Well, gosh!" Jack felt about three years old instead of his proper twenty-three. "A fellow's got to make a living . . . go to look out for Number One. And how in hell do you know all that, anyhow?" He was getting angry now.

"We Martians know many things." Mura preened himself.

"But when you hung around the First Expedition base. . . Oh, I remember you now . . . you couldn't talk English, let alone quote Shakespeare!"

"Keats!"

"You were reading our minds then!" Jack really was horrified. "You were learning our language. Spying on us! We should have shot you!"

"Quite!" The Martian studied him like a bug. "But you didn't shoot me and now we take precautions."

"By picking me up? But I'm nobody. You just wait. . . ."

"Ever hear of Commodore Perry?" the Martian cut off his tirade.

"The . . . the one who said 'We have met the enemy and they are ours' "?

"No. Captain Brown's hero. The one who met the Japanese and they were his . . . the Perry who opened up the Hermit Kingdom to American trade by pointing American guns around."

"That was a long time ago." Jack deflated.

"One hundred twenty-odd Earth years isn't long, to us at any rate. Servants of the Anarchiate have no intention of letting a new Perry open up poor old dying Mars like an oyster."

"But I'm not a member of the Second Expedition." Jack clapped a hand over his mouth, too late.

"Don't be upset. We know the second wave is on its way. You are just an advance bacterium of the plague. Perhaps we have time to use you in the preparation of a vaccine that may prevent contagion. You, my dear boy, have been chosen to be Commodore Perry—in reverse."

"Doesn't sound very nice," murmured Jack.

FULLY alert now, Jack's immature but agile mind scrambled like a mouse as it tried to grasp the situation. The Martian eyed him with what he guessed

was a Speculative Expression.

"Personally, you will benefit, barring accidents," Mura cooed. "If you obey the Anarchiate, it will present you with a handsome gift in exchange for your . . . diamonds. Your peculiar ambition to become a millionaire may be fulfilled."

"Funny!" Harkness was fishing among a few remembered fragments of a snap course in political economy. "Funny that anarchists should be giving orders."

"Isn't it?" Mura fixed the human with his other glittering eye.

"And your title . . . Putteret, is it? What does that mean?"

"Oh . . . " Mura lost some of his reptilian poise. "I'm a sort of official greeter, police captain or public relations man. Come!" He changed subjects briskly. "We'll go to The Station. There everything will be made clear." After retrieving the discarded tomato tin as though it were something precious, he stalked off toward the green "shore" of Syrtis Major.

"Hey," Jack called after him ."What about Bill . . . my partner?"

"He won't become conscious for several hours," Mura answered confidently. "We shall return for him after your indoctrination."

"Wait till I lock the port, then."

"Of course. I keep forgetting your private property fetish."

After the locking-up had been done they set forth. Mura made the pace in a gliding walk that Jack imitated to avoid being tripped by the low gravity.

Five minutes brought them to irrigated fields that rimmed the sea of dust. A further jaunt among rows of russet cactus growths of all shapes and sizes and they stood at the foot of a tower of opaque yellow glass or plastic. A lens on its roof quested slowly, studying the empty desert and the equally lifeless sky.

"Watching for Indians?" the Earthman ventured to wisecrack.

"Whites!" the red man chirped. "Caught one, too."

Frank felt his age again.

"Couldn't you manage, somehow, not to sound so exactly like Captain Brown?"

"Coitenly, chum. You want I should talk dis way like?"

"Why, I had forgotten *him!*" Jack chuckled and relaxed a bit at this perfect imitation of the First Expedition's greased monkey.

The main room inside the tower somewhat resembled a police station. Under a bright light in one corner, a big fellow with an eyeshade was punching entries into a calculator. Only the spots of scar tissue on his bowed shoulders distinguished him greatly from a human desk sergeant who had dared to strip down to long-sleeved red flannel underwear and a gold-encrusted Sam Brown belt.

Around the severely functional hall, a dozen or so off-duty guards were lounging. They came to attention as their Pitaret entered, then relaxed at his nod and a few bars of Martian.

"This way," said Mura, pointing to an elevator. "Your guardian angel is waiting."

"I beg your pardon!"

"Your guardian angel will see you now."

"You mean . . . ?" Jack looked about for a way of escape.

"Don't be juvenile! I meant exactly what I said. The Anarchiate assigns an angel to every being from outside who visits Mars. Its duty is to protect said being and to see that our laws are obeyed. Mostly, angels are never seen by their protégés, but yours has expressed a desire to make itself manifest."

"Gah!" Jack recovered and amended his remark to: "Must be a gag of some kind."

HE ALLOWED himself to be guided to the elevator and, a moment later, to be led into the observatory at the tower top. (From inside, the yellow dome was transparent, allowing a view of

miles over the depressingly flat countryside.) In the room's center bulked an instrument that he surmised must be an electronic telescope. He had one brief glimpse of it before his attention focussed, with a painful wrench, upon the room's occupant.

The creature stood facing him, wings outspread in a gesture of welcome.

Wings! Angel! His thoughts tumbled. Female! That was doubly, angelically, delightfully obvious under their sleek armor of feathers. Feathers! He realized, as spots swam before his eyes, that he had forgotten to breathe in his astonishment, and gasped wildly for air.

Scarlet as sin itself . . . with golden eyes that probled into the depths of his soul. Little more than five feet tall. Exquisitely slim, like fragile Venetian glass. A classic Greek profile. But with wings!

A sextuped! Ridiculous! Any biologist could give you six excellent reasons why. . . .

An angel? Not with that build, that quirk to her sweet lips and the wicked twinkle in those wonderful amber eyes.

Mammalian. . . Oh, definitely! Humanoid. Related to the dominant Martian race, certainly. But with wings . . . wings obviously meant to fly with.

No! Flight must have been impossible in Mars' dissipated atmosphere for at least a hundred thousand years. Dissipated? Who was dissipated. Not Jack Harkness. He was sober as a judge. But WINGS! "The Bird of Time!" he whispered.

"Go away," he said aloud. "Vanish. Aroint thee!"

The vision persisted, smiling like a pixilated Mona Lisa.

"Mura," he pleaded, "I've had all I can stand. Call off your telepathic dogs."

Mura did not answer, but the angel began singing in faultless English and in an equally faultless soprano:

"Welcome, Earthling, brave and daring;
Welcome to the soil of ancient Mars.
Have no fears while here you're faring.
There shall be a peace among the stars."

That did it! Jack had caught his breath at the unearthly quality of the first notes. Then his expression of complete idiocy changed to an amazed grin.

IN MEMORY Jack was attending the Christmas party staged by members of the First Expedition four years previously. He was hearing Captain Brown direct the singing of that ancient carol, "Deck the Hall."

By the time the angel had finished the first verse of her version he was leaning against the telescope and laughing so hard that tears streamed down his freckled face. This was superlative and, he suspected, deliberate satire.

When he recovered, dead silence shrouded the observatory. Mura and the angel were glaring at each other while the air practically sparked with the intensity of their warring thoughts.

"I told the little fool not to overdo it," the Pitaret gritted at last. "I had hoped . . . But never mind that! Mr. Jack Harkness, may I introduce Mars' first citizen, Princess Yahna, of The Line."

(Royal angels, yet, in an anarchy, thought Jack to himself—so he imagined.)

"Oh, yes," sighed the Princess, "even I am sometimes confused by our customs."

"This is like going around without my skin," Jack grumbled. "Isn't there any way I can keep you two from reading my thoughts?"

"If there were, I wouldn't tell you." Mura licked his lips in what Jack had decided was the equivalent of a smile. "But let's get down to business, as Captain Brown was so fond of saying.

"You see before you the highest ranking representatives of the government of a dying planet. Mars is rapidly becoming uninhabitable, particularly now that humans are moving in on us. Oh, we realize why you have to move in. A capitalist economy can remain healthy only if it expands constantly. It must extend its frontiers or sink into anarchy, just as our Martian economy did

several duomillenia ago."

He sounds like a Senator, thought Jack.

"Thank you for the compliment. I am a statesman of sorts; one who objects to Mars becoming humanity's new economic frontier. I don't want to see the time come when our ancient culture is laughed at by tourists just because it is different from yours. I don't want to see Mars deluged with your manufactured goods so you may have markets for your surpluses and thereby maintain your prosperity at our expense. . . Is this getting too deep for you?"

"No," lied Jack.

"In other words," Yahna ruffled her feathers proudly, "we are not interested in playing cowboys 'n' Injuns with you."

"Oh!" He looked at the princess with growing respect.

"Since Mars long ago used up most of the metals, fuels and chemicals needed to build and power weapons strong enough to keep humans from overrunning us again," Mura resumed, "we have decided. . . ."

"Overrunning you *again?*"

"Oh, yes. I had forgotten that glacier-bedeviled humanity doesn't know its own history. You are incorrigible overrunners. When Mars was young we drove you back to your planet, whereupon you tumbled into savagery for a gratifyingly long time. Really intelligent Martians emigrated to the ends of the universe to avoid a second encounter. Those who remained couldn't let well enough alone. They tried to re-civilize Earth. . . Atlantis and all that. Not only was our colony a failure but it gave you the leg-up you needed to go on another rampage."

"Then you have space travel?" Jack's eyes were popping.

"Of course. Unfortunately, though, one doesn't do much travelling without a plentful supply of fissionables. That is our situation at present. We are al-

[*Turn page*]

ready living largely in the age of wood and silica toward which Earth is rapidly heading.

"Not only does Mars lack most raw materials," Mura went on sadly, "but it is practically depopulated. Our capital, Crotan, is the only large city we can maintain. Under such circumstances we can't possibly defend ourselves so we plan to move out and let you have our husk of a planet by default."

"Earth won't like that!" said Jack firmly.

"No picturesque pleasure dome," Yahna sighed. "No flying girls. No living fossils."

"I think I understand." He tried to stop staring at her and couldn't. "You two want me to stage a delaying operation until the Martians can get safely away!"

"Correct. But we also want you to help us make a graceful exit," said the Pitaret. "You've heard of teleportation?"

"As a screwy theory, yes."

MURA seemed to be enjoying Jack's bewilderment. "Screwy is exactly the word. Teleportation twists space into a knot. And it lets those who use it go far beyond the reach of any rocket ship. But only one teleport exists intact on Mars. We do not have the resources to construct another. So the Anarchiate is hoping that, for a suitable fee, of course, you will steal the original for us."

"I don't get it." Jack was beyond his depth again. "I thought anarchists—"

"—owned everything in common." As usual, Mura was far ahead of the Earthman's spoken words. "That is true. But consider: If everything belongs to everybody, then nobody can take forcible possession of anything. Do you follow?"

"No!"

"He means Martians don't steal." Yahna looked up from studying her fiery fingernails and smiled impishly. "Like George Washington couldn't tell a lie."

"Look," said Jack making another unsuccessful effort to light a cigarette, "maybe it's because I've been in suspended animation. Maybe it's because I have to keep thinking about my breathing. Maybe it's just because I'm stupid. But nothing either of you says makes a particle of sense to me. In fact, I'm beginning to think you are ghosts."

"What's a ghost?" asked Yahna. (Members of the First Expedition had neither believed in nor mentioned such things, so her education had some gaps in it.)

"Never mind," Harkness went on doggedly. "If you're not figments of my imagination, how about proving it by ordering up a square meal? Then we'll go out and get Bill. Then I'll sleep a day or two. After that, if you still want any ownerless teleports stolen, and your price is right, why I'm your man."

He leaned his forehead against the cool plastic of the dome and closed his eyes. Then he roused himself suffiicently to ask one more question:

"What do you use for money up here?"

"Well," Mura began, "we are fresh out of uranium, thorium, hafnium and all the other fissionables except barium. . . . Oh!" He licked his lips. "You're thinking of gold! Why, I think we could find some of that lying around."

III

BILL? You awake?"

"Ummm? Oh, yeah. Yeah. Boy, did I sleep! 'Sfunny, isn't it? You go on a Suspenso jag that keeps you flat on your back for three months. And when you come out of it, you have to sleep some more."

"You believe that story Mura and the Princess told us last night?"

"A dreamboat," breathed his sandy-haired pal, raising himself on a lean elbow. "An aphrodisiac! A double-distilled, potently-personified fairy tale. Wow!" He fell back and studied the gold-etched glass ceiling.

"You mean the yarn they spun us at dinner?"

"Of course not, stupid. Neither am I referring to that awful yeasty stuff they fed us. I'm speaking of the angel I love."

"I saw her first."

"Doesn't matter. Nothing matters. If she asked me to steal Deimos and Phobos, bring them down here and play marbles with them, I'd do it.

"But a teleport!"

"No crazier than a bird woman with, uh, one thing and another."

"But to transform solid particles into waves, project 'em through a space warp and then change 'em back to particles and reassemble 'em good as new and alive. I don't believe it."

"Hey, you're stealing my lines." Bill sat up, tried to dangle his shanks over the edge of a bed, and found the bed was a collection of cushions spread on a gold-embossed glass floor. "I'm the pessimist around here, usually. But this time I'll have to say teleportation is possible, though improbable. Basically, it's no more remarkable than telephony, you know."

"So all right. We steal the thing from the Avron, whoever or whatever that is. Then what do we do with it?"

"Probably we get killed stealing it. But, if we succeed. . . Why Jack, whatever can you be thinking about? We hand it right over to Pitaret Mura and dear little trusting Princess Yahna."

"Then we go find a hole, crawl into it and pull it in after us."

"Uhm huh. After all, we humans were painting our bodies blue when Mars was digging her canals. Even yet we're a bunch of gullible hillbillies, aren't we?"

"Seriously, Bill." Jack sat up and hugged his knees thoughtfuly. "If your maternal aunt, say, willed you a teleport, what would you do with it?"

"I'd. . ." He drew in his breath softly. "First thing I'd do would be to put Moon Mines, Inc., out of business. What they did to me! Sent me out to their damned hole on a one-year, renewable contract. Agreement was they'd arrange transportation home if I wanted to quit after the year ended.

"You know what happened? Every one of their rockets that touched at the mine just happened to be full up. Oh, Moon Mines were desolated. The next ship would have a shock hammock reserved for me sure. But I'd have stayed there till I rotted if you hadn't bailed me out. For that, Jack, you can have a gallon of my blood any time you ask. And if you make any passes at my angel, you'll be needing transfusions soon."

"Make any passes at *my* angel and I'll take every drop in your body."

Jack got up and headed for the bathroom. A moment later he was spluttering in bewilderment.

"Hey, Bill," he called. "Come see how the other half lives. A bathroom without running water . . . without *non*running water. . . How the devil. . ." He pushed buttons and watched the results with delight. "Now what do you know? So that's what passes for the shower? Sterilizing light of some kind."

"You can't sing in a thing like that."

"I've been thinking about that teleport half the night," said Jack after they had finished their toilets and were dressing as best they could in the dimly lighted bedroom. "Earth is only about one jump behind Mars on its way to the junk heap. We've used up our raw iron, copper and petroleum. We've washed our best topsoil into the sea. We're living on scrap metal and hydroponic food. We're dying like flies from cancer, droopneck and pernicious anemia, because the trace elements have leached out of what soil is left.

"But Venus is a jungle not fit for dinosaurs. Mars is a dustbin. Jupiter's moons may be traveling refrigerators, as Mura insists. With a teleport, though, we could probe the universe. We could find warm, fertile, uninhabited or easily overrun planets of other stars."

BILL stopped trying to comb his unruly hair and stared straight ahead. "Millionaires! Huh! We're gonna get a

corner on the teleport market and become the first trillionaires!"

"And how," asked Bill as he tightened his belt, "are you going to keep our fine feathered friends from reading your mind?"

"Ulp!" The telegrapher-psychologist looked horrorstruck at such a possible invasion of his perfidy. "Do you think," he fumbled, "that Chanticleer understands Spanish?"

"I doubt it, unless he learned it out of a grammar in the ship's library. In that case the pronunciation would throw even his great birdbrain into a loop. Remember, he learned what he knows about us humans by listening to the thoughts of everyone on the First Expedition. Well, nobody except us knew any Spanish, far as I recall. And we weren't advertising that we were deserters from Sahara Irrigation by talking it, or even thinking in it. But what has Spanish got to do with telepathy?"

"More than you think, my base, unfeathered friend. All thoughts must be expressed. . . No, that's not it! All thoughts have to be *thought* in words of some kind. Take away a man's language and he becomes little more than a beast until he invents another one. (There's my fool degree in psychology talking.)

"Very well—if, in the pinches, we think in a language no Martian knows, I'll bet my trillion against yours they won't have the slightest inkling of what we're up to."

"It's worth a try. Let's go see what happens. I hear breakfast calling."

After some tinkering they found a small lever that, when pulled, dilated an opening in one bedroom wall. Mura was standing just outside!

"Dios!" thought Jack. *"Es possible que el estaba eschuchando?"*

Aloud he said: "Hello, Pitaret. Nice morning."

In his confusion, Bill tripped himself up. He thought: "Good morning, Mura."

He said aloud: *"Mil diablos aggarte,* Chanticleer."

"You boys must have had a bad night." Mura looked at them dubiously.

"Yes," Bill agreed. "Takes a while to get used to gravity again."

They walked down a chilly corridor, lighted at long intervals by ceiling panels of luminescent glass. They entered a windowless, shadowy room where a score or so of Martians were perched around spidery trestles, eating. One or two looked at the humans a moment, then turned their scarred backs.

"Brrr!" Bill's exclamation was involuntary. "Oh, I beg your pardon, Pitaret."

"It *is* cold, even underground," the Martian sighed. "Dreadful weather we've been having these last few summers. It goes down to twenty below zero, topside, at night. The canals will choke if it drops lower than that."

Chatter about the weather on Mars, Earth and the Moon kept them occupied until a moving belt along the center of their trestle delivered breakfasts.

Bill studied his with disfavor: A small cup of hot green fluid and a fluffy pyramid of purple vegetable. He took a gingerly sip and, after watching how Mura picked up the fluff with his long fingers, a bite.

"Not bad," he had to admit.

"Food isn't too much of a problem," said Mura. "Most of our artifacts are made of plastic or glass. Solar energy runs our factories and keeps us from freezing down here in underground Grotan. But solar engines are too bulky for use in vehicles. We're trapped. We can't migrate seasonally from pole to pole, the way our ancestors did . . . the way instinct bids us." He stared owlishly at his guests. "I wonder if you can even begin to imagine how distressing a thwarted migratory instinct feels?"

"Probably just the opposite of homesickness." This from Jack. "And the teleport will remove that and other frustrations?"

"It will." Mura licked his fingertips delicately. "It most certainly will."

"Does it operate on solar energy?"

"What? Oh yes, yes. Solar energy, naturally."

"What a pity we can't read *your* mind, Mura," Bill piped up between bites.

"Gentlemen, I am crushed by your suspicious attitude. Last night a contract was signed. In exchange for one thousand pounds of gold you transferred to the Anarchiate all right and title to your cargo of diamonds. Said contract also stipulated that (1) Mr. Harkness would accompany Princess Yahna in an attempt to regain possession of the teleport and (2) Mr. Newsome would remain at Crotan to bring me up to date regarding developments on Earth since the First Expedition left Mars. Is that correct?"

They nodded, each thinking in Spanish for all he was worth.

Mura shook his bright head repeatedly, as though trying to dislodge an insect.

"What language is that?" he snapped.

"Griego," thought Jack.

"Ingles," was Bill's mental rejoinder.

"Very clever. I will discuss this matter further with you, Mr. Newsome. Mr. Harkness, I have requisitioned a boat. You start south as soon as the canal melts."

"Look," said Jack uncomfortably, "do I *have* to have my guardian angel tagging along? Isn't it a bit . . . excuse me . . . a bit indecent?"

"Indecent?"

"Well I mean, a man and a woman, alone on a long trip. On Earth. . . ."

WHAT Jack had come to think of as "that bug look" appeared on Mura's face. "In the first place, it would seem to me that Terrestrial morals are not all they might be for such thoughts to cross your mind. In the second place, you spoke of a man and a *woman*. For your peace of mind and ultimate survival, I suggest you do not think of the Princess as a woman."

"She looks, sounds and even smells a lot like one!" Jack was nettled.

"She is, however, of a different species. I assure you that, being only a martoid, so to speak, you are repulsive to her. Even I find myself barely able to tolerate your presence and I'm sure you feel the same way about me. That being the case, let us have no more speculation about miscegenation."

Bill snickered. Jack shut his mouth on a hot retort. They finished the meal in silence and left the dining room under a barrage of black looks from other occupants. (They, too, had been eavesdropping, Jack realized with a shock.)

An elevator shot them up a good many storeys to the watchtower. Yahna, looking as pretty as a redbird in spring, was waiting with a heavy garment resembling a ski suit.

"What's the Princess wearing on this jaunt?" asked Jack after he had donned the thing and adjusted its self-sealing edges.

"I don't need a parka," Yahna caroled. "My feathers are warmer."

"And more becoming," he grinned. (No female, even if she had seven heads and ten horns, was going to find him repulsive very long if he could help it.)

His guardian fluttered long, feathery eyelashes just as he had known she would.

Mura veiled his eyes disapprovingly and was thankful once more that telepathy was not a human trait. Bill approvingly touched forefinger to thumb at the sally, but added out of the corner of his mouth:

"Pero no olvides las transfusiones de sangre!"

Lifting a wingtip in farewell, Yahna led her protégé out of the tower and into the fields. She was fairly bursting with excitement. Every now and then she would leap into the thin air and sustain herself for several seconds with a great beating of pinions that filled Jack's eyes with sand.

"You don't know. You can't know," she chanted in the upper register after one such abortive flight, "what it means to be going south with the spring. When Mars was young all of us followed the

seasons, just as your birds do. Even after the air became so thin we no longer could fly, the whole population continued to follow the sun in swift canal boats and dune scooters. Now there is little fuel for motors and even less metal to make motors. We huddle in our caves . . . and wait."

"*Do* you find me repulsive?" As he blinked his eyes clear, Jack came back to the thing that had been bothering him.

"Not repulsive!" she exclaimed. "I look upon you, rather, as a child. Why, you can't even read my thoughts!"

"*Si piensos tienes!*" Jack thought sourly.

"I wish you wouldn't do that . . . think in that outlandish language. You can trust me."

"Why?"

"Well," she floundered, "you can trust me because I don't trust Mura. He is one of my fiancés but I can't bring myself to love him. He's too sleek."

They had reached the canal by this time. It was a weed-and-ice-choked stagnant cut, running from horizon to horizon, in which only a faint current stirred. At a crumbling wharf a small boat waited. It had a V-shaped bottom and a sort of Archimedes screw instead of a propeller.

"You know how to run that contraption?"

"Contraption? Oh, you mean the boat. Certainly I do." She hopped aboard, then hesitated over the turbine and boiler that took up most of the space in the open hull. "You put hydrocarbon under there." She pointed at a firebox already filled with charcoal. "You set it afire and turn on this blower to get more oxygen. Then. . . ." She looked charming and helpless.

"Never mind," he said. "I can handle it."

When they were puffing south at a good clip Jack boasted:

"A physical chemist gets a pretty good briefing in mechanics, you know."

"Maybe humans are more intelligent than we thought."

SHE fluttered those amazing eyelashes again. "We flying girls are more interested in the arts than in mechanics."

"Aren't there any flying men?"

"Oh dear no. Haven't been for ages, except among the Avron, of course."

"Hmm!" Jack had a sudden vision of some real competition. "Who, what and where are these Avrons?"

"Avron," she corrected. "Why, everybody knows that. The Avron is the last of a race that ruled Mars ages ago. They live . . . she lives under a great dome at the South Pole, according to legend."

"According to legend!" In his amazement he almost capsized the boat on an ice hummock. "You mean you've never seen them. . . Mura's never visited them?"

"Oh no," she answered demurely. "No Martian dares go there alone. We would come under the spell again."

"Then why in blue blazes . . . ?"

"You are going to protect me," she beamed. "You are not a sensitive. I mean I can read your thoughts, of course, but I can't dominate you . . . nobody can. So when we get to the Avron I'll hide behind your tough, immature mind and they won't dominate me either. That's what Mura thinks, anyway."

"We're going back to Crotan!" He put the tiller hard over.

"Oh, no." With surprising strength for one of such a slight build, she snatched the stick from him and got the boat on course. "We can't do that. The Avron knows we're coming. It would be terribly hurt."

"Have it your way. But I don't like this. Maybe Bill and I had better take our gold and hightail it out of here."

"Mura wouldn't let you do that."

"Wish I could smoke on this crazy planet," he groaned. "I need a cigarette."

"Try sitting in the draft from the boiler blower," she suggested.

He did so. The excess oxygen kept the cigarette going.

He eyed her speculatively and thought

Spanish. Then he thought about her. Though the sun was well up by now, the temperature was still below freezing. Yet she sat at the tiller, while the thin wind whistled about her, in perfect comfort. Then there was the matter of her shoulders. They were as wide as his own to support those unbelievable wings and they rippled with muscles, visible even under her plumage. Yet, despite her triangularly athletic build, she seemed as delicate as an autumn leaf, and as colorfully beautiful.

"Legend says," she startled him out of his smoke-wreathed reverie by chiming, "that there was intermarriage among Martians and humans when we ruled Atlantis. Do you suppose there could be any truth to it?"

" 'When the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men and they bare children unto them,' " he quoted. "Maybe that explains my red hair? Or Indians? Or our stories about angels? Or Jove's thunderbolts and Thor's hammer?" Then he came down to earth with a thump. "Hey! Why did you ask me a question like that?"

"It just occurred to me it might be more fun marrying you and Mr. Newsome than Mura and Kawl. They're both so dreadfully stuffy."

"Me *and* Bill!" Jack choked on the cigarette butt.

"I know it wouldn't be proper unless there were a fourth. So, before we left, I asked Awoni, my co-bride, to be especially charming to your friend."

Jack hummed grimly between set teeth.

"Why, Mr. Harkness, I didn't know you could sing," she sang. "But it's some funny language you're thinking in again. What do the words mean?"

"It's an old French song called 'Alouette'," he grinned. "It goes thisaway:

'Alouette.
Dear sweet Alouette.
Alouette, I shall pluck your feathers.
I shall pluck you on the head.
I shall pluck you on the head.
Alouette. Alouette. Oh!
Oh—oh!' "

"Barbarian! Dolt! Jackass!" Yahna spat at him, so shaken she dropped the tiller. "To insult a Princess of The Line! Any Martian would have kissed my sacred wingtips at such a proposal. While you! You compare me to a dreadful old hen you would pluck for dinner. Imfang! Catacoust! Welk!"

Two tears trickled down her straight little nose.

JACK came out of his shock and made a grab for the thrashing tiller. Too late!

The boat slammed its bow deep into the reed-covered bank.

"Now you've done it," he groaned, scrambling to his feet for a quick look around.

A musical thrum, like that of a giant's guitar, made him duck.

"Speaking of welks!" he yelled.

Something like a ten-foot-long blacksnake whip snapped through the air where his head had been. The thrum sounded, much louder now.

He looked frantically for a weapon and snatched the tiller from its pin. As the whip lashed out again from the reeds he swung with all his might. The blow connected solidly. The stick was ripped from his hands. The thrumming shot up to a shrill keening, just on the threshold of audibility.

"Yahna," he shouted. "Out of the boat. Quick."

There was no time to find out whether his order was obeyed. Death was at his elbow! Death in the gullet of an overgrown frog!

Jerking open the boiler fire door, he snatched up a double handful of live coals in his heavily gloved hands.

Before he could straighten, the whip struck again. It coiled itself tightly around his middle, contracted, jerked him off his feet and dragged him toward the bank.

He grasped the slimy thing with his fire-filled hands. Despite the agony as the coals started burning through his gloves, he hung on doggedly.

He was whipped back and forth like a rag doll. Although he willed to hold on, the torture in his fingers forced them to relax.

The whip started withdrawing, loosening its rib-cracking grip and sliding through his smoking hands like a greased cable. The thrumming made his bones rattle as it rose into the supersonic register. He blacked out.

He came to with Yahna bending over him, splashing his face with the fetid canal water.

"What happened to the welk?" He labored to pump air back into his lungs.

"It's over there in the mud bleeding to death. I cut off its tongue with a reed knife while you were holding it taut. Look." She held up the monstrous, ichor-dripping appendage.

"Oh."

"I do think," she comforted his ego, "that the welk would have run away after the way you burned it. Do all humans think that fast?"

"Not all of us," Jack confessed. "We Harknesses are pretty quick on the trigger, though." Then, as he studied his blistered hands he added: "Angel, I guess you'll have to steer us into heaven."

IV

YOU may as well know, Mr. Newsome," said Mura, "that we have cracked your *Ingles-Griego* code." (They were in the observatory several days after Jack's departure.)

"Just call me Bill." The human forced a grin.

"We set an analyzer to work. It informs us that you have been thinking in a language basically quite similar to English and supplied us with phonetic transitions — Ingles equals English, Griego is Greek and so forth. We find that you and Harkness plan to appropriate the teleport."

"Who is 'we'?"

"Servants of the Anarchiate, naturally."

"They're not much in evidence, are they?"

"We were speaking of other matters." Mura shifted eyes.

"We were speaking of a gadget called a teleport."

"Between ourselves, Bill, I gravely doubt that there is such a gadget. I suspect it's just part of the legend that has grown up around the Avron."

"Then why did you send Jack and the Princess on that wild goose chase?"

"To get them out of the way, principally, although there is no harm in spying on the Avron when an opportunity offers. I said 'principally' with a double meaning, however. I fear that your friend has some of those unfortunate inhibitions known vulgarly as principles."

"That's news to me."

"On the other hand, you are a reasonable man. You don't let principle stand in your way."

"Oh no. I'm a stinker of the first water."

"You are not alone. For example, whoever sold you that cargo as diamonds bilked you. Those stones are zircons . . . zirconium orthosilicate."

"You mean," Bill bristled, "that you're going to welch on our contract?"

"Quite the contrary. I just want to tell you a story . . . one I scanned in a history book when I was supposed to be sweeping out Captain Brown's cabin. You have heard of Peter Minuit?"

"The man who bought Manhattan Island from the Indians for 24 dollars' worth of trade goods?"

"Correct, as far as you go. But here is something you may not have noticed: Those goods, that cost the white man so little, represented untold wealth to the Indians. Think of it! Weapons that could kill game at a great distance and make a loud noise into the bargain. Knives and tomahawks sharp as razors. Cloth such as no red princess could have bought at any price. Diamonds . . . or their equivalent."

"I don't get you."

"There's more to it," Mura went on. "The Indians knew very well they didn't own Manhattan. The earth, like the water and the air, was a gift from Manitou. If stupid white men were willing to trade a fortune in exchange for a worthless title, why, everyone knew that white men were crazy."

"But Manhattan Island is worth billions today."

"Until such time as an atom bomb drops on it."

"And the Indians are on reservations."

"Again until such time. And meanwhile they pay no taxes! Also you must remember that Indians were a primitive, trusting people. Yet even they have had their revenge, after a fashion. Gold, which Aztecs and Incas used only to make ornaments until the white man took it from them, corrupted and ruined the Spanish Empire. If I am not mistaken, that same gold is on the verge of touching off a war that may wipe out the human race."

"What are you getting at?" Bill's face had gone white.

"Just this. The people of poor old dying Mars are neither primitive nor trusting."

"So?"

"So why do you suppose I, and other Martians, made such a fuss over that zircon ring that Captain Brown pretended was a diamond? Why did we practically roll on the sand whenever we got a look at it? Why did we beg him, 'Please, Br'er Fox,' to bring us thousands of those sacred stones to worship in our underground joss houses?"

"Well?" Bill found himself shouting in the echoing dome. "Why did you?"

"Harkness could have told you if he had stopped to think about anything but my girl with the red feathers. That was another reason why I . . . we . . . sent him south: So he wouldn't put two and two together in a spare moment. Even you, my trusting primitive, have worked on the Moon and know the answer. What is zirconium used for?"

"Why, uh. . ." The psychologist cudgled his brains. "It weights silk, makes glass opaque and preserves food. It cures ivy poisoning. . ."

"Don't be puerile!" Mura was hopping with proud impatience.

BILL spoke on. "It is a component of incandescent lamp filaments. It toughens steel. It . . . Holy Smoke . . . it is a 'getter' in creating high vacuums used in electronic work and, because of its extremely high melting point, is the only really satisfactory coating for the interiors of rocket tubes and . . . and atomic breeder furnaces!" Bill sank into the nearest chair and stared out over the red desert.

"Here," said Mura, extending a smoking Gurlak. "Drink this. It will make you feel better.

"Zirconium," he crowed, "is fairly common on the Moon. But it is one su-

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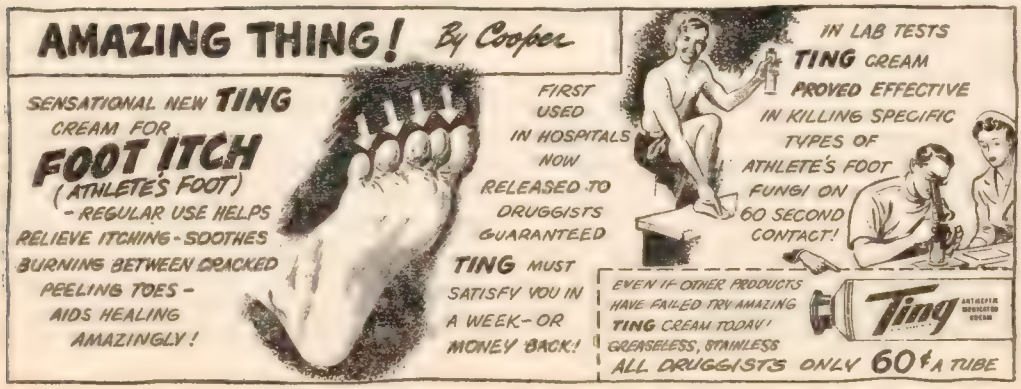

premely important metal we Martians can neither mine any more, find a really good substitute for or even synthesize now that our supplies of uranium are exhausted.

"Two thousand of our years ago the last pinch of it was used up, due to the stupidity of some of our engineers. Oh yes, Martians can be stupid. Too late we realized we should have made any sacrifice to send ships in search of new sources. That was a black day in our history. Since then our civilization has disintegrated as we have been forced back to the use of chemical fuels.

"Now you two innocents come along. For a few bars of worthless gold you trade us barrels full of precious zirconium . . . enough to get one of our atomic piles back in operation. The Second Expedition will bring more.

"Think what it will mean!" Mura leaped to his feet and threw his arms up and back as if trying to fly. "Our furnaces turning out plutonium again. Our ships . . . perhaps our teleport . . . probing space again. Our weapons invincible again. Nothing will be able to stand against us." His sharp teeth came together with a click; his sharp nose and sharper chin worked like the halves of an eagle's beak.

"Worm!" he sneered at the human.

"Upon my word," Bill sneered back. "The mad scientist in the flesh."

"It is time, worm," said the Pitaret, "for you to tell me all you know, according to the terms of our contract. My first question is this: Has the balance of power in the United Nations shifted between the Eurasian-African and the All-American Alliances since the First Expedition left Mars?"

"Our contract was based on fraud and is therefore invalid," Bill fenced aloud, but his mind automatically offered the information Mura had asked for.

"Well!" cooed his tormentor. "I had expected as much. The Russians are retaliating against a western trade blockade by dumping their gold reserves. And the United States must buy that gold or let the world's currencies collapse. Hmmm. How much *more* gold would it take to break the market?"

"Twenty-five . . . hundred tons," thought Bill.

"Childish stratgems won't help! You are thinking that twenty-five tons or so, dumped at just the right moment, might do the trick. We have that much and more. For untold generations, gold was an end-product of our atomic piles."

"Now you're being childish," Bill jeered. "Even I know that the end-product of radioactive decay is lead. Gold's in a different column of the atomic table, the one containing copper, silver and other non-fissionable metals."

"All metals are fissionable to a degree and under the right conditions," Mura corrected. "In the good old days, when we had plenty of natural fissionables and power to burn, we used to knock three protons out of the end-product lead nucleus and transmute it into gold for the embellishment of our cities and ourselves.

"Later, when uranium, thorium and the other 'naturals' ran out, we took advantage of the fact that our abundant supplies of lead had a greater positive packing fraction than gold. We fissioned the lead, although it took some doing, obtaining more gold and a bit of energy into the bargain."

"Have it your way." Bill was out of his depth.

"This Second Expedition, now," Mura resumed his questioning. "Is it financed by the United Nations or is it a business venture that the U.N. merely oversees?"

"*Wie befinden Sie sich?*" gibbered the human. "*Eeenie, meenie, minie, moe.*"

"Ah. That's really interesting." The Pitaret licked his lips excitedly. "So there's a struggle going on between those who want to reach other planets out of scientific curiosity and the jingoes who want to exploit and colonize them? You needn't tell me which side Captain Brown's sponsors are on. . . Has your military developed any spec-

tacular new weapons recently?" he inquired.

Frantic as a child lost in a maze, Bill dodged and parried. He even shifted his thoughts back into Spanish, the only foreign language he really knew. No good!

"Is *that* all they've come up with?" chortled the Martian. "I was afraid a guided missile base might have been set up on the Moon. . . It's a pity you don't know Japanese, my friend. I doubt that our analyzer could have cracked an agglutinated language and, of course, we Martians do not resort to violence in obtaining information. Now tell me. . ."

Hour after hour the grilling went on while Bill, fighting every inch of the way, laid his mind bare, synapse by synapse.

Once he attempted to strangle his tormentor and was dissuaded by two husky guards.

Once he tried to hurl himself through the dome, only to be bounced back, bruised and bleeding, by the resilient panes.

"That's enough for today," said Mura when the human was on the verge of nervous collapse. "I leave you with this final thought: For telling me what you have had to, you will be considered a traitor by your kind. Better stop this foolish resistance and join us. There is an honored post for you in the Anarchiate."

"Go to hell," Bill sobbed, his aching head on his knees.

"Now I have a treat for you." Mura laid a hand on the sandy head. "After you've had a rest, Awoni, my co-bride-to-be, will show you around Crotan. She's a dear child . . . a groundling, unfortunately, but charming, nevertheless. If you knew our customs better, you would appreciate the great favor I am showing you. Come along now, my friend. I'll take along you to your room."

Eyes dull, shoulders drooping with exhaustion, Bill allowed himself to be led away like an obedient dog.

AS THE days passed, Bill's sense of degradation developed enough scar tissue so he could at least look at himself in a mirror. After all, he could not help himself. And there might still come a time when he could pass along information about Mura's plans to the proper authorities.

The proper authorities! The thought brought him up short; made him realize for the first time how much he had matured since his arrival on Mars. No longer was he the insolent—and naive—freebooter who looked upon the suns and planets as pearls in his oyster, and owed allegiance to no one unless it was his friend Jack. Now he owed allegiance to Earth!

No, he fumbled, he owed allegiance to *human decency;* even perhaps to Martian decency. His recent seance with Mura made him unalterably opposed to all people who pushed other people around. The Second Expedition, now: It, too, unless he was badly mistaken, was based on fraud. He was opposed to *that.*

Well, so was Mura! Bill's knowledge of psychology, superficial though he knew it to be, pounced on that idea and shook it. Was he going to fall for a shallow "My planet, right or wrong" philosophy? But what was the alternative? His tendency toward pessimism told him there probably was no alternative.

He groaned in despair. Then, since no restrictions had been placed on his movements, he went in search of Awoni. She had, in a few days, become the one bright spot in his dilemma. Dumb she was, no doubt—although her I.Q. probably was double his own—but a delightful diversion and surprisingly compliant for a co-bride-to-be.

Chattering like a magpie; clinging to the arm of her great big spaceman like any bobby soxer, she showed him the few sights of underground Crotan.

Sipping Gurlak and squeezing out ceremonial tears as required by the ritual, they held hands as they watched the

almost unbelievable sunset dance of the eleven remaining flying girls. (A six-fingered hand "holds" just as pleasantly as a five-digited one, he noted with a touch of guilty surprise.)

They visited power plants and factories where puzzled technicians were stripping protective coatings from machines unused for ages and mulling over well-preserved instruction films.

Once they even peered into a great room where other scientists were toiling like ants to get an atomic breeder pile back in operation.

Mostly, though, they just became acquainted with the residents of Crotan . . . a handful of charming, well-educated, smiling people who ignored the fact that their race, and their planet, were dying. When not engaged in farming or performing duties in the little city that had been hacked out of the sandstone of Mars over the millenia, they enjoyed themselves by dancing, engaging in group singing of everything from eerie folksongs to extemporized operettas, camping on the windswept icy dunes, or exchanging ideas either orally or telepathically.

The downy people gave Mura and his belted policemen a respectful but wide and pointed berth. (In fact, Bill was baffled by wondering what purpose the cops served in such a law-abiding community.) And they treated Awoni like some odd child who had taken a fancy to a tame and presumptively harmless exotic animal.

"Can he actually cross space?" they marvelled. "Didn't he get terribly cold? He's practically hairless. And unable to read a single thought? The poor thing. Can he actually talk?"

"He's almost Martian," Awoni would defend her pet, "especially when—" At that point she would break off with a secret smile.

On occasion she dragged him across town to visit Mura and the mighty Kawl at a monastically-furnished apartment the trio shared. Mura invariably was polite, never referring to his session of catharsis with Bill. Kawl talked only about his exploits as a sand skier. Awoni curled up on the most comfortable perch and watched tri-di color television—evidently the only organized diversion on Mars—until she fell asleep.

They sipped Gurlak—it resembled strong mulled wine, Bill had decided—and, having nothing particularly in common, bored one another with small talk until it was time to go. Just, Bill reflected with a grin, like a group of neighbors back at his home town in Texas.

So the time drifted until one day Mura announced that three ships of the Second Expedition had established orbits and were braking in for a landing.

V

WITH another companion, Jack would have become bored by his slow progress toward the Avron's eyrie. But Yahna's vivid personality and musical chatter kept him, by turns, fascinated and irritated but never bored.

Even when they reached a main south-southwest canal, several times wider than the branch that passed Crotan and beginning to flood with water from the melting ice cap, the scenery remained depressing to the ultimate degree. It consisted largely of flat sea bottoms planted with endless rows of cacti. Yet, when Yahna told him that the rotation of Mars itself, instead of the giant pumps he had envisaged, pushed water toward the Equator, the sheer engineering genius of those forgotten builders made him gasp.

The cacti ranged from spiny, barrel-shaped spring growths to towering, stiffly-branched old monsters. Caricatures of weird animals in poses of pain or mockery reminded him of Joshua trees he had seen in the American Southwest. His guide said that many varieties needed only simple processing to supply both thermo-plastic and thermo-setting materials of almost every degree of utility, from fabrics to structural materials as

tough and ductile as steel. What, he wondered, could such grown-to-order plastics mean to an Earth where metals were becoming harder to find with every passing year.

Occasionally the Grand Canal did cut through highlands. Here the landscape was worn, humpbacked hills covered with mounds of brick-red shale. Those mounds, Yahna said, were tailings from mines that had tunnelled to fantastic depths under the surface of the planet before the search for minerals was despaired of.

"All our farmers now live in abandoned old mines to escape the cold nights," she sang in the wistful anapests she affected when in a melancholy mood. "There is little charm left on the surface of Mars, you can see."

Jack understood why she had made that reference to the surface when the sun sank on the first evening of their trip and cold creeping in from outer space drove them to shelter in one of those farming communities. The family that made them charmingly welcome—but not worshipfully so, despite the Princess' ennobling wings—consisted of four softspoken adults and an equal number of noisy children. (Four offspring was the quota, Yahna whispered, since Mars could not support more.)

The youngest was a winsome baby as heavily furred and, despite her sad stubs of wings, as cuddly as a kitten. ("We had hoped she would fly," Yahna translated the sigh of one of the co-fathers, "but we were not so blessed. We must take her to the hospital for amputations next month.")

Eldest of the children was an adolescent in the embarrassing process of shedding his natural fur coat and assuming the soft down of an adult. ("Our philosopher," one of the mothers introduced him proudly.)

The family lived in the topmost level of an abandoned mine, apparently content despite the primitive facilities. They had painted or stuccoed the walls in bright colors and had highlighted them at intervals with vegetable oil lamps or the inevitable gold plaques and intricately woven screens showing scenes of the planet's robust youth. They set an ample, though monotonous, table. And they knew about Jack, Bill, the quest for the teleport and the early arrival of the Second Expedition.

"We keep in telepathic contact with our friends at Crotan," one of the men explained. "It is almost like living in town. Tell us, though, Princess, if you approve of your present trip. All Mars is talking about it and, as you know, much of the comment is unfavorable. Why chance stirring up the Avron? Hasn't she already done enough harm?"

"It is Mura's feeling that Mars will need all of its defense weapons when the Terrestrials came," Yahna replied.

"Defense?" The sweet voice of the adolescent cracked with the intensity of his feeling. "Didn't Quirtades teach self-defense is never justifiable? And wasn't it passive resistance that broke the Avron's grip on us?"

THERE followed an eight-way discussion that, despite Yahna's translations, drifted far beyond Jack's depth. As he fought to grasp its subtleties he had the disturbing impression that the furry, round-eyed infant understood much more of what was being said than he. He did decide, before he nodded off to sleep on the cushions they had spread that, in addition to a pathological fear of the Avron, all looked dubiously upon the machinations of their dynamic Pitaret.

"Now maybe you will explain," he said to Yahna the next frigid morning after their boat was on its whirring way, "how such charming, proper people have developed such, uh, peculiar family relationships?"

"Peculiar?" A ruff of tiny feathers encircling the base of her slim neck stirred as she sensed his meaning.

"Why yes. Four men and women living together like that. I'm pretty broad-minded, but still. . ."

"How else should they live, you filthy barbarian?"

"Oh, come now." He backed water furiously. "Don't get mad. I was just pulling your . . . your wing. Didn't know you were that touchy about it."

"Since we're on the subject," she ruffled all her feathers at him now, "why not tell me how beings who call themselves civilized can possibly tolerate, let alone enjoy, such a spiritual, physical and emotional straightjacket as monogamy?"

"I could teach you to like monogamy." He winked at her brazenly.

"Some Earthlings do enjoy the blessings of polyandry and polygamy, don't they?" she shot at him triumphantly. "I remember Mura telling me that in Tibet—"

"Well, if you call such things blessings, yes," he admitted grudgingly.

"So that's why your infant mind was so horrified yesterday when I proposed! And I merely thought you found me repulsive. Why . . . Why, if we ever get back to Crotan, I'll scratch your ugly eyes out, Jack Harkness!"

" 'Alouette, charming Alouette' " he sang, not too badly out of tune.

"Stop that horrid cacophony!" she shrieked while his heart leaped to see how utterly divine she looked when angry.

" 'I shall pluck your feathers. I shall pluck your neck.' "

"No. *No!* Stop it, I say. Please!" Amazingly, she dropped the tiller, put both hands to her neck, shrouded herself in her wings and burst into sobs.

"Now Yahna!" He brought the boat back on course with one bandaged hand and patted her clumsily with the other. "I didn't mean it. Honest I didn't. I don't care a damn how Martians conduct their love lives. I was just talking."

The sobs did not abate.

"Gee whiz." He pressed her against him despite her halfhearted wriggles. "Look, Bill's my best friend, but I'll be a three-toed sloth if I want to be married to *both* of you." (What did one do when a birdwoman wept?)

"You horrid *man*," she wailed inside her barrier of feathers. "If you really loved me. . . I know: You have a sweetheart back on Earth."

"No!" he protested. "It's you I love, Yahna." (M'gosh, why had he said that?)

"You really do?" One damp eye broke cover to study him.

"Of course I do." (Well, he thought in astonishment, I guess I do at that!)

"And you won't yowl 'Alouette' at me any more?"

"I won't. I swear it." (Except under extreme provocation, he made a mental reservation.)

"I'll try not to provoke you." She sat up and preened. Then she started to laugh, not maliciously, but wholeheartedly and merrily. "Earthmen are funny, too," she cooed and took the sting out of the words by kissing him soundly. (Kissing, he decided, must be an old interplanetary custom!)

So it went: Visits to the cultured Martians at night; endless discussions mixed with lovers' quarrels and reconciliations by day. In the process Jack came to understand and appreciate the variety and captivating charm, both of the brave inhabitants of the gutted planet in general, and of Yahna in particular. She ceased to be an alien life form. She was human!

"And to think," he marvelled on one occasion, "that Bill and I came here to rob the socks off a bunch of gooks. Lord, were we green!"

"I like you for saying that, Jack." Yahna patted his healing hand.

ON THE tenth day they encountered fields still unplowed and covered with patches of melting snow. On the thirteenth, they reached the slowly retreating edge of the polar ice cap. Water had cut deep channels through the glacier at many points. Down these, freshets poured into the canal. Their little craft soon could make no progress against such currents.

"Now what?" Jack stared out over the

white blanket that stretched, unbroken, to the pole.

"We take to the ice," the Princess replied. "The bottom of the boat is made to serve as sled runners. The screw will dig into the ice and push us."

"What will we use for fuel?"

"If we loaded everything in sight," she hazarded, "we might make it."

"All that distance?"

"The pole is only a hundred of your miles away. Mars is a small planet."

They dragged the boat onto firm ice. They prowled the muddy canal bank collecting burnable debris. Last season's cactus stalks and roots; branches of stunted trees resembling sagebrush, and even dead rushes, were loaded until their craft resembled a haystack. Then they squeezed themselves into the stern. With Yahna steering and Jack stuffing the boiler at frequent intervals, they bumped southward at fairly respectable speed through ever-thickening mists.

They made it too, just before sunset —and almost killed themselves in the process. Suddenly, out of the fog, a perpendicular, milk-white cliff loomed. So nearly did it match the snow that Yahna saw it only at the last minute. She slammed the tiller hard over. The boat skidded wildly, hurling Jack overboard, and came to a bone-shattering stop against the barrier.

"Jack! Are you hurt? Jack darling!" Yahna cut the thrashing screw and rushed to the Earthling. He was spread-eagled on the icepack, unconscious.

"Great Land of Nod!" She wrung her hands, then rubbed his face with snow. "What shall I do now?" she moaned when he did not respond. "Avron! Avron, help me."

The temperature, which had been reasonably warm during the day, was plummetting now. Soon it would become unbearable, even for a Martian. They must find shelter, and at once.

Yahna bent her head, listening.

"The portal," she crooned after a time. "It must be near. Yes! To the left." She grasped the unconscious man by his ankles, set her teeth and began dragging him across the ice.

Minutes later, when she was gasping from exhaustion, a crazy door of cracked and eroded plastic caught her eye. It was not locked. Only a drift of snow kept it from tumbling off its hinges. But through its cracks trickled a stream of warm air.

PRINCESS YAHNA dug madly at the drift with fingers and toes, sweeping the loosened particles away with strong wing beats, much like the 'Alouette' she hated. With the last dregs of her strength she cleared the lintel and forced the portal open wide enough to admit passage. Bending almost double against a wash of dense air, she dragged Jack inside and fought the door closed.

For long moments she leaned against the white wall, sobbing in utter weariness. Then she went back to her task of resuscitation.

"Hey. Don't. Stop it!" Jack mumbled at last. "I'm awri'. Lemme rest."

"You're sure you're not killed?"

"No. Jus' battered but unbowed." He sat up, then lay back with a groan. "Knocked the wind outa me. Ow! Cracked a rib, too, I think. But I'll survive." His eyelids dropped. "Warm here," he whispered. "Gotta sleep li'l while. Then we'll go on."

She cradled his head in her lap and listened to his snores. (Did snoring explain, maybe, why Earth women could tolerate only one husband? It certainly couldn't be called musical. . . Had a kind of rhythm, though. . . Sleepy rhythm.)

She jerked herself awake. This was Avron territory. She must stand guard. Mustn't relax for a moment. . . Not with good old non-sensitive Jack asleep . . . sleep . . . slee. . . .

A long while later Yahna shook herself, pushed her lover's head off her aching knees and sprang to her feet.

The air! Real air! Not like the thin, wornout stuff outside. Almost as dense as at the theatredrome. She could fly here! To prove it, she beat her wings

until blood sang through her veins.

There was something she must do. What had she been thinking of, lazing here? It must be almost dawn. She looked casually at Jack. Gross, raw-boned creature . . . especially with his mouth open! He might sleep all day. Meanwhile, she would go to Mother Avron.

In the gray light she stood slim and burnished, like some outlandish Joan of Arc leading an early morning foray. Without a backward glance she took to the air with a roar of plumes.

She slanted up for several hundred feet under the inward-sloping bulge of the wall . . . up and up until the sand scratches on its outer surface thinned away and it became clear as glass . . . up until the rim of the sun rose over the horizon and gilded her.

Soft wooded hills beckoned to southward. The range was composed of three miniature peaks amidst a chain of well-watered foothills that stretched to the horizon. As she reached the center of the triangle she threw back her wings and slid down-air in the whistling dive.

The sun slipped back under the horizon as she dropped. Rainbows caressed her when she landed on a hillside covered knee deep with purple sward. Brooding silence surrounded her. Not a lizard sang. Not a leaf stirred. Nothing moved except shadows.

On impulse, she threw back her head and let her throat pulse with the thrush-like call that had been the rallying cry of Martians since time began.

At first only echoes responded. Then, far in the misty distance she heard an answering call, sweet as an arpeggio played on some fairy harp. Moments later she was surrounded by flashing yellow wings.

As they folded, Yahna beheld three beings much like herself. Two were slender, laughing girls bearing fruit and flowers. The third was a youth with a sulky mouth who wore a jeweled wristlet.

"A Red One! Welcome!" came the boy's admiring thought.

"You must be hungry," 'pathed one of the girls. "This fruit is freshly picked. Do have some."

"And these." The other girl was weaving the flowers she held into a chaplet. "You must wear them around your lovely head."

"Thank you, friends," Yahna hesitated, "but I . . ."

"Oh, come now," laughed the boy as she drew back. "Don't be shy." He broke a branch bearing opalescent fruit and stepped forward purposefully.

THERE was something about him that set Yahna's heart throbbing uncertainly. He was so sure of himself. At the same time, though, there was a queer, lax quality about his face, and those of his companions, that repelled her.

"I am not hungry," she lied firmly, starting to spread her wings.

The others pressed so closely about her that she was earthbound.

"Well," the boy was becoming petulant, "if you insist on being rude, I'll have to. . . ." He was raising his hand to press the fruit against her lips when his wristlet whirred like a serpent. He cried aloud, then stared at the trinket like a hurt child.

"It was she!" This thought leaped from the girl at Yahna's right. It was surrounded by images of supreme authority and of trembling fear. "Don't touch the Red One." Her face was wax-like.

"Yes." This from the boy. "It had been so long . . . so long. We forgot." He rubbed a hand over his eyes. Then, to Yahna: "Come. You are awaited."

The girls fell back slightly but remained close enough to impede any attempt at flight. Gently they herded their guest toward the bottom of the slope.

Turning left when they reached a stream that sparkled through the dell, they continued on, first at a rapid pace, then at an amble.

"This is so dull," the taller of the girls

complained at last. "We were all going to make love today."

A whir from the wristlet answered. The boy winced and quickened his steps.

"Look! A lizard!" twittered the other girl before fifteen minutes had passed. "It will be delicious!" She half-ran, half-flew in pursuit until the leader's angry shout brought her to heel. All had worried looks on their smooth faces when the cavalcade reformed.

"Red One," frowned the youth, "this grass hurts our feet. We haven't walked so far in . . . ages. Will you promise to go with us if we fly?"

"Of course. I must see the Avron."

They winged upward; swept along a canyon past a waterfall that broke thrice during its descent and splashed into a pool where sporting Martians trilled at them. Turning in formation, they crossed a plain.

Now the girls burst into song. Soon Yahna and the boy joined in. It was an ancient melody that awakened formless yearnings. It told of another age, a green world, a people young and masterful.

A white building formed among the rainbows. Its balconies reminded of the waterfall, and of the song as well. They alighted on a marble ramp near an arched entrance.

No guards barred the way. A few golden youngsters flitted through the half-lighted, soaring interior balconies. They paid the newcomers only casual attention.

They stopped before a round, zircon-studded door nestling just under the dome. As it irised the Princess heard a frightened twittering and a rush of wings. Her guides had departed.

The portal opened to its fullest and disclosed . . . a nest!

It was an eyrie such as she had seen only in metallic tomes recording the birth of her race . . . books so old, so worn, so alien that they antedated the

[*Turn page*]

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time when Martians became flying mammals . . . marked the era during which they still were ovoviviparous!

SOMETHING moved in the nest. It was naked. It was weak. It was incredibly ancient. Yet its agate eyes were alight with intelligence. And, when it lifted a bald head and opened its wide, diamond-shaped mouth, the voice that poured forth was rich in overtones.

"Welcome, Princess," intoned the sprawled being from its downy resting place. It reached out an arm—or perhaps a featherless wing—to touch her but she recoiled.

"Do not fear me, Red One," quavered the Avron. "The danger lies elsewhere. Have you touched it?"

"Touched what?"

"The food my poor ids must have tried to force upon you."

"No."

"Good." The creature's tense fierceness relaxed and it switched to telepathy as though its effort at speech had exhausted it. "You are from Crotan?"

"Yes. From Pitaret Mura."

"Pitar*et!*" The thing actually chuckled. "There was a time when only a Pitar sent messengers to the Avron. What does the Unspeakable want?"

"We are being. . . The Pitaret fears we are about to be invaded by Earth. He—"

"Earth?" The strange mouth opened in a hiss of disgust. "That mud puddle? That den of hopping monstrosities?"

"Earth has . . . advanced," the girl stumbled. "It has a great civilization, the outgrowth of colonies that Mars placed there long ago. Now Earth is overcrowded. It also seeks colonies."

"And it comes here? To this hell hole?" The Avron fluttered with feeble mirth. "I must know more of this. Yes, much more." There was an interval, during which the quiet wrapped about Yahna like a stifling blanket.

"Go, Princess," that thread of thought came again. "I am weary. One becomes quite weary after a Time. And I must think . . . Earth! I was there once when young. . . Ugh! And yet, it might be better than this cold prison planet." The fleshless head lifted for a moment on its wisp of neck. The eyes regarded Yahna speculatively, first the right one, then the left. "Have no fear. I will watch over you. But let not my ids persuade you to eat. And, as you value your soul, return here when I call." The eyes closed. The head sank upon its couch of down.

VI

YAHNA tiptoed from the room, swooped down the central shaft of the temple, passed the outer door and mingled with the groups of golden ones who wandered the lawns. Her original captors did not reappear. The other inhabitants of the polar dome paid her slight attention.

Occasionally a smiling girl would approach to offer food or admire her plumage. Just as infrequently a boy—there were no mature people in evidence—would eye her with detached lechery. But the majority did not speak to her, or to each other, for that matter. They seemed roaming in a mental fog that kept all contacts fleeting and simple.

Were they children? No! All Mars, the histories said, had passed through a phase like this. That had been eons ago when Martians, bruised and bleeding from vainglorious attempts to expand throughout the Galaxy, had reeled back to their ravaged planet. Almost to their eternal damnation they had heaped their troubles on the patient back of their Mother Demigoddess, the nearly immortal Avron. Mindlessly they had done her bidding, as a bee swarm obeys its Queen, letting individual intelligence and initiative waver toward extinguishment, even as their wings trophied in the thinning atmosphere.

Then, with the end in sight, a few brave souls had revolted. The Avron tried to hold them to her, as an over indulgent mother clings to a retarded

child. Somehow the bravest had disentangled themselves. Stripped of their wings, left with only a vestige of their magnificent mental powers, the rebels had starved and died by the millions as they started the long, almost hopeless process of rebuilding a ruined civilization upon a planet that never could be rebuilt.

But the golden strain had remained faithful to the Avron. Here in the south they had patched up one of the plastic domes as a refuge against the cold and the near-vacuum. Here they had vegetated. Had something the Avron introduced in their diet held these descendants of proud conquerors to the mental level of children?

A bit of overheard dialogue between two languid, giggling girls partially disabused her of this idea. Their remarks were couched in terms of sophisticated, ageless evil.

Then, as she turned the corner of a hedge, she came upon a reclining youth engaged in an utterly impossible pursuit. By means of pure thought, apparently, he had brought a miniature planet into being for his amusement. It spun slowly, twenty feet above his head. It was complete in every detail of oceans, rivers, forests and even infinitesimal animals and people. Fairy castles reared beside sapphire lakes. At one castle a war was being fought between. . . .

Feeling Yahna's eyes upon his creation, the boy grinned, allowed his toy world to vanish in a puff of light, jumped up, and gave her chase!

Heart hammering with a terror in which she was horrified to find a trace of pleasure, Yahna fluttered upward just in time to evade the grasp of those round arms. She kept a few lengths ahead of them until a golden girl crossed the line of flight. Thereupon her pursuer waved airily and set out after more complacent game.

Well! Yahna dropped to the ground in a fury. What manner of creatures were these, indeed? Intelligent? Obviously! But flitting from one interest to another like humming birds, with no purpose they could keep in mind for more than a few minutes. What had the Avron called them? "Her poor ids." A bunch of decadent, sex-ridden, winged idiots, that's what they were!

Not idiots! Ids! She searched her memory for scraps of information she had picked out of Mura's mind. The id represented the subconscious. . .no, the unconscious. In the normal being, it was confined to the "basement" of the mind; was seldom allowed to sate its primitive hungers. The Ego kept the id enchained during the daytime. The Super-ego, or censor, wielded the whip over it when the Ego slept. Only in times of great mental stress could the id partially break its bonds and rise to the level of consciousness.

"Yet the id must be given its due," Mura had once said. "It is the repository of a vast amount of knowledge. Under hypnotism it can perform mental feats that put the Ego to shame. Probably a memory of all the past of our race. . . possibly a memory of its future. . .is locked within the id."

Yahna touched the shoulder of a girl who was romping past her toward a lagoon where others splashed and screamed in mock combat.

"Excuse me," she 'pathed. "I seem to have forgotten the words of Thiurna's 'Song of the Fourth Planet.' Do you remember them?"

"You've forgotten!" The girl clapped her hands. "Oh, how wonderful. A new sensation! How does it feel. . .to forget anything?"

"Why it feels. . .silly," floundered Yahna, following her new acquaintance's example by sitting down on the turf.

"You really can't remember? But then, you're a Red One. Red Ones are atavisms and therefore schizoid. Well, here's your stupid old song."

Her feathered throat pulsed with sweet music.

"Uona ulam fulador. . .Evain mandran ha. . . ."

ON AND ON, while Yahna listened enthralled to the epic of Martian springtime. It was a song so ancient that only the title and a few scraps of the verses were preserved in even the oldest histories.

"Primitive, but rather pretty," yawned the Golden One as she finished. "Much too spiritual, though, don't you agree? Come, let's have our swim."

"Tell me one thing," Yahna ventured. "Are you really an id?"

The child squawked! Her fingers darted out like claws. Her eyes shadowed with hatred, as though she had been subjected to the ultimate insult. Then, poised to strike, she laughed instead.

"Am *I an* id?" she sneered. "Your semantics are abominable. *We are* id, and id alone is free." She did a dance step, then burst into tears and fled.

Shunned from that moment as though she carried a plague, Yahna paced the garden for slow hours, awaiting her recall by the Avron. What if it did not come? A night among these uninhibited creatures could be full of terror.

Already, though the sun was still high, she saw couples lackadaisically pairing off among the trees. In the drowsy afternoon not a bird sang, unless the passion-filled, muted carolings of the Golden Ones could be called those of birds. Not a relef barked from the pools. This world was dead. . .long dead.

In the extremity of her loneliness some barrier broke inside her mind. What was she doing in this awful place? Where was Jack? How could she have forgotten him? Lying there bruised and bleeding. . .perhaps dead from neglect . . .her neglect!

"Jack!" she screamed. "Jack. Come and help me. I'm so very lost." In despair she flung herself on the grass and beat the ground with impotent fists.

"Great grief, Yahna, is it really you?" a startled voice asked above her.

She rolled over and stared at the boy who had chased her. Only. . .no, it wasn't that boy. This one didn't have wings. He was wearing heavy torn clothing. And he looked tired and sick. Why, he looked like . . . no, this was some evil Avron trick! But it had to be Jack. It was Jack. She jumped up and flung herself into the waiting arms with a force that almost knocked him down.

"Jack," she panted. "If it's really you, kiss me. That's the way I'll know."

"Of course it's me," he said with a fine disregard for grammar after he had spent a time doing her bidding. "Who'd you think it was?"

"There was an evil thing who chased me."

"That could have been me, too. I tried to talk to you a while back. You flew away like crazy. I almost thought it was your double. Lucky thing I trailed you. The brambles and thickets were almost too much for me."

"Brambles? Thickets?" She looked around dazedly. There *was* no purple grass. They stood on a sere, brushgrown hillside, legs scratched and bleeding from thorns sprouted in the eroded soil.

"I don't understand," she moaned. "It was all so beautiful. . . And where are the Golden Ones?"

"You mean those skinny morons flitting around? They look more like yellow curs to me. Half-starved, too, though they kept trying to make me eat some kind of green berries. Got quite nasty when I wouldn't."

"How did you get here? I left you miles and miles away."

"Miles? What are you talking about? The barrier is hardly a mile from here. What kind of a mad greenhouse is this, anyway, with everything jammed together in it, like plums in a pudding?"

"Mura warned me," she whimpered like a child whose new toys has been broken. "The Avron still has power to make Martians see and do what she wants them to."

"She sure does. And I don't like people who push other people around, mentally or otherwise. Let's go knock some sense into her head."

"No." She hung back. "I'm afraid."

"Honey child, if we can whip a welk,

we can at least outpoint an Avron. Where's her hangout? That whited sepulchur you swooped out of a while back?" Taking her firmly by the arm, he walked her toward the building.

IT WAS awe-inspiring rather than beautiful now, like a cliff that had withstood the elements for ages. The balconies were chipped and scarred by forgotten battles. The noble ramp was crumbling. The very marble looked tired. And the interior of the structure was heaped with filth and fallen cornices. Only the zircon-studded door looked the same to Yahna when she found it after endless climbing up tottering stairways.

Jack hammered on the panels with both fists. He would demand an explanation!

As the portal dilated he strode through it masterfully, then stopped dead.

That embryonic horror the Avron? Skin crawling, hair stirring on his scalp, he stumbled backward, and collided with the Princess in his unreasoning retreat.

"Stand still," whispered the girl. "Say nothing!"

He forced himself to do so, although his impulse was to run madly from something so alien that he could relate it to nothing in previous experience . . . run until his heart stopped or his mind rejected all memory of this monstrosity.

His brain felt like an apple; one of those candy-covered apples on a stick that his grandmother always bought for him when they went to the Morgan County Fair. Somebody was turning the apple slowly. . .slowly. . .trying to decide where to take the first luscious bite.

Even in his panic he had to marvel that such a fancy should have struck him. He had to be getting out of here, away from those probing agate eyes, while he still retained a shred of sanity. Damn Yahna! Why did she bar the door? He must be getting back into space. Even the cold, glittering stars were better than this . . . this mental vivisection. Please, Yahna. Pretty please, sweetheart! Leave this place!

Grandma was like that, though, he had to admit. A hard woman, the neighbors said. Made him work like a slave on her little Indiana farm. But, whenever they went to the fair, she would spend her last cent on a candy apple or a toy boat to make his boy's eyes shine.

"Well!" said Grandma. (She, too, had eyes like "aggies", he remembered now.) "Well, I declare! You sartainly are the brash youngun, Jackie, comin' all the way from the big city to rob an ol' woman of her fanciest heirloom!"

"Yes'm. I mean. No ma'am." He kicked a shamed toe at the floor.

"If I could be sure Yahna and you wouldn't hurt yerselves playin' with it, I'd be of half a mind to give it to you. It's so old and wornout I'd been thinkin' about puttin' it in the barn anyway."

"Yes'm," he stammered, still unable to look up.

"In love with Yahna, too? She's a mighty nice girl. Still, your folks haven't lived in the neighborhood very long. I don't quite know how to take 'em. Why, land's sakes, last time I was over to your place, your grandpaw was aswingin' by his tail, thumbin' his nose at a high and mighty dinosaur. . .and prob'ly figgerin' out how to rob it of its back teeth. Guess I sort of underrated his abilities. . .bet on the wrong primate, you might say. If I'da been as smart as I thought, I wouldn't be in the fix I am now, with the old homestead plastered with mortgages."

"Yes'm."

"I like you and yourn, though, Jackie, even if you always were a bunch of climbers." The Avron started to stretch out an . . . arm . . . to pat his head, then thought better of it. "And I'm proud as can be that you're sweet on my Yahna. Why, most critters would run and scream at the bare sight of her, or," she added with a sly side glance at the Princess, "start thinkin' right off about plucking her for Sunday dinner, like Alouette."

"Please, Mother," husked the girl.

"I'm sorry. Shouldn't've said that. Guess I'm gettin' senile.

"Well, Jackie, when I first heard you were comin' to visit, I got some mighty big ideas. Those notions were senile, too, I see now. Nobody's goin' to stand up against humans for very long, 'specially after they intermarry with Martians a few more times. . . There's yere teleport . . .that old thing over in the corner." The Avron's head sank weakly onto its downy cushion.

Slowly, wonderingly, not a bit frightened now, Jack lifted his eyes and stared at a battered, dial-covered box crouching in the shadows. It seemed little larger than a telephone booth.

"That?" he asked in a cracked voice. "Gee, I thought it would be. . .lots bigger."

IT'S LITTLE, all right, but it drinks power like water," answered the Avron. "Never was too much good in the first place but I just couldn't afford to build a fair sized one. Now, with plutonium and electricity scarce as hen's teeth, I've had to turn it off. There's only enough power left to keep this old place ventilated and half-way decently warm." She was shivering, although the temperature in the room hovered around blood heat. "The controls still are set for my old colonies. I wonder what ever became of them. Sometimes. . .but no, I'm being senile again.

"Now you two younguns run along with it." The demigoddess' voice turned querulous. "I'm an old woman and it's long past time for my nap."

"But how can we get it to Crotan?" Jack dared to ask.

"Tsk! I'm woolgatherin' ag'in. I'll have my poor ids carry it to the boat. That's about all they're good for any more. I can spare a pinch of fuel for your motor, too . . . enough to get you home."

"Thank you very much, Grandma." Jack was surprised to find his eyes wet as he repeated that boyhood rigmarole. "Is there anything I can do to make you more comfortable?" he asked her.

"Why yes. There is, you know." The bald head rose for the last time and those awful eyes looked at him almost bashfully. "If you'd ask 'em to pipe television up here, I'd surely appreciate it. Our receiver's broke down. And it does be dreadfully dull, sometimes, for a body who can't get around like she used to."

"I'll ask Mura as soon as we get to Crotan," he promised.

"That's a nice boy. Now go out in the hall for a minute. Yahna is a fine girl and much smarter than she sometimes talks, don't you ever forget. But she's young enough to be a bit oldfashioned about monogamy and things like that. If she's going to marry you. . .and she is, no matter what you say. . .there are a few things I must tell her."

VII

COLONEL Horace Brown of the newly created United Nations Space Army, was first down the gangplank of his new flagship, The Titan. (No spacesissy, he!)

Behind him stumbled three members of his staff, their faces drawn and waxy from combined after-effects of deceleration sickness and Suspenso. One carried a movie camera.

The colonel was a big man—bony frame, wide teeth, leonine head. His mane of gray hair stirred in the piping wind as he removed his peaked uniform cap and stood, while he slowly counted ten, with it pressed over his heart. The cap held a walkie-talkie microphone.

"Mars at last: 'A hope beyond the shadow of a dream,'" he quoted in a magnificent baritone. When silence called for more resounding sentiments he added:

> "'Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
> And many goodly states and kingdoms seen.'"

Perfect! That should knock them dead when the recording was 'vised in every home on Earth.

He looked about like a middle-aged eagle and frowned. There certainly wasn't any gold in evidence. The ruddy cactus spread in smartly dressed columns in every direction, though. Some of the plants held up round, thick leaves as though saluting.

There was the United Nations flag he had planted four years before, only slightly frayed by the dry, thin air.

There was that same mysterious plastic tower, thrusting out of the flat ground like a phallic symbol. There was the equally mysterious opaque dome that the gooks had never allowed him to investigate.

But where were the gooks themselves in their golden harness? They must have heard the roar of the braking rockets in time to rush from their caves and fling themselves prostrate as they had done before. Confound it, he had been counting on them to climax a spectacular TV scene.

Ah, there they came, the lazy dogs! Brown held out a broad, hairy hand. An unerring adjutant filled it with a pair of binoculars.

Hmmm. A hundred of them had popped out of the base of that tower, four abreast, like red soldier ants. Wearing so much gold they could hardly clank. Well drilled, too, and armed this time. There came their leader in the van. You never could tell one Martian from another but, dammit, that chap looked familiar. This whole thing didn't have the right feel.

"Have a machine gun cover us from the ship," Brown told the adjutant.

Who in blazes was that fellow wearing pants? He fiddled with the glasses, then dropped them. By all the little pink demons! That was Sergeant Newsome, his old brasspounder. He'd know that ugly square mug a mile away.

"Make it two machine guns," he barked at a lieutenant.

He considered withdrawing inside the ship, then flung his head back proudly.

No! Face 'em down. Show no weakness. White man's burden. All that!

Right hand lifted, palm outward in what was, or should be, the interplanetary sign of peace, the colonel paced forward, majestic, undaunted, alone.

The leaders met at the base of the pole bearing that old U.N. flag.

"Welcome back, Colonel Brown," sang the Pitaret. "Welcome to Mars."

> " 'charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam of perilous seas, in faery land forlorn.' " .

Mura saluted with a snap. After a second's hesitation, Brown did likewise.

"Our seas are stopped with dust, unfortunately," the Pitaret added, "but you humans have been a long time getting here."

"I don't understand," the deflated colonel husked. "Weren't you my. . . my. . . ."

"Dogrobber's the word, isn't it, colonel? Yes, I'm Mura, your own gook."

"But how did you learn English. . . and Keats?"

"My adjutant taught me. I think you know Mr. Newsome here?"

"That. . .that Moonjumper!" Finding someone upon whom to vent his spleen at last, Brown let loose a blast that made the very cactus quail. "He's under arrest."

"I'm afraid not," said Bill, who had been enjoying himself immensely. "You forget I didn't re-enlist. I'm a private citizen."

"Where's your passport?"

"Diplomatic relations have not yet been established between Mars and Earth," Mura reminded him. "No passports are required."

"*Humph!*" The colonel got a grip on his emotions. "Sorry, Mura."

"*Pitaret* Mura, servant of the Martian Anarchiate. At your service."

"Oh—ah."

BROWN made one of those switches for which he was famous. "I'm in a spot of trouble, Pitaret. No use denying it. Nine-tenths of my crew are pretty badly off with space sickness and I'm afraid the other ships will be no better

when they come down. We're short of food and our water has gone foul. Could you help us out?"

"With pleasure, sir. I'll have supplies, a doctor and nurses here at once."

"Ah yes, a doctor." The colonel was trying desperately to readjust his ideas about Martian civilization. He blinked at Newsome for several moments. Then a crafty look came into his ice blue eyes. "There's another thing," he said. "Both my radio operators are in sick bay. Would it be possible for me to borrow the services of your, ah, adjutant, so I could get in touch with Earth?"

"Well." It was Mura's turn to be disturbed. "Mars has rather strict censorship laws, you know. Also, I would hate to have Mr. Newsome meet with an. . . accident."

Brown growled deep in his throat, then shrugged it off.

"You may come aboard with him and inspect all messages," he conceded.

"Splendid. Splendid, colonel," beamed the Pitaret, playing his role of human to the hilt. "Now, do you suppose any of your men feel well enough to accompany me to Crotan? A welcoming luncheon has been arranged."

Brown looked at the members of his staff, all of whom blanched and looked back at him in silent, obedient misery.

"I'm afraid you will have to excuse them this time," he said with a twist of his firm lips. "I will be delighted to go, however. I have a stomach of iron, sir." Then, realizing that this might not sound too complimentary, he hastened to add: "Never been space sick in my life. Never!"

Three hours later Brown and Mura repaired to the tower observatory to admire the view, sip Gurlak and "talk business."

What a luncheon, thought the replete colonel. Held at the Theatredome and well-planned, sir. Well-planned indeed. Golden dishes! And all the guests wore big gold badges with their funny names printed on them in plain English. There had been a speech of welcome by the Pitaret and he had been at his best in a response. The climax had been a "stage presentation" starring The Eleven Flying Girls. His hometown Rotary Club couldn't have improved on it much. The Martians had done things up in style.

Horrible stuff though, this Gurlak, but one simply must observe the customs of the country. Hmmm, yes, particularly if one hoped to drive a good bargain for one's trade goods. Wonder if part of the price could be a pair of those red pigeons to take back to the States? What a sensation they'd make.

"I must apologize, sir," Mura began, "because we were not quite frank with you when the First Expedition came here. However, you can appreciate our feelings. We are a dying race, with few material resources. We distrusted you virile strangers and wanted time to evaluate your motives. It seems ridiculous, but we feared you might have plans for conquest."

"Nonsense, my friend." (What kind of talk is this? Calling an owl-eyed bird friend, thought that half of the colonel's mind which had not yielded to the suave influence of Gurlak.) "We have no plans for conquest. None whatsoever. Just want to trade on fair terms. You'll find that we of Earth are all honest. Scrupulously honest. We are lovers of peace, too. Wouldn't hurt a fly, Pitaret. I mean, not a living thing." (But let me get my hands on your gold horde, his thoughts ran on, and you won't act so cocky. Pity I can't do the oldfashioned thing and just take it, the way Clive and Cortez did.)

MURA leaned back in his perch, crossed his legs awkwardly and lighted one of the cigars the Terrestial offered. "That being the case—" (Great Avron! If his lungs survived this ordeal he would be lucky!) "That being the case, let us dispense with ceremony and get down to brass tacks." (Was he overdoing things? No, that was impossible with such an egocentric fool.) "No beating around the nest . . . I mean the

bush. The Anarchiate has authorized me to handle all negotiations. Let us draw up a contract right now. Then you can spend the rest of your time here enjoying yourself and getting better acquainted with poor old dying Mars. Your cargo consists of . . . ?"

"Uncut zircons, largely, since I understood those precious stones are highly prized here." The Old Man almost swallowed his adam's apple as a thought struck him. "I hope I was not mistaken in *this*."

"Certainly not, sir. Certainly not." Mura licked his lips. "We can use any quantity of zircons in our, ah, temples."

"As much as three tons?" Brown leaned forward, ready to back-track, if the answer were "No", by saying he had brought only a fraction of that amount.

"As much as three tons," Mura agreed. "But what can we offer in exchange?"

"Well," beamed the colonel, "you seem to have quite a lot of gold here. It is prized as an ornamental metal on Earth. What would you say to a three-for-one exchange—nine tons of gold for my three tons of zircons?" (He held his breath. With zirconium pretty much a drug on the market since Moon Mines had opened, with the price of gold newly pegged at $50 an ounce. . .) "That would mean a profit of—" (He scribbled on the back of an envelope and blinked at the result. By all the little pink demons!) "—a clear profit of, let's say ten per cent after transportation. That's fair, isn't it?"

"Not at all!" Mura had been doing his own figuring, based on thoughts in the colonel's wide-open mind.

"Well, uh, the zircons *are* uncut. Perhaps I could shade the price a bit." (If he could only get the little bastard to make a two-for-one trade, his share would make him a rich man while the companies backing him would coin millions.)

"No, my friend. Your price is not too high. It is ridiculously low. *Gold* is a poor thing to exchange for *gems*. I cannot let you rob yourself. Interplanetary friendship must not be based on fraud!"

"No. Of course not," Brown gulped. "What would you consider fair?"

"How much cargo can your three ships carry back to Earth, sir?"

"Let me think." Brown stared out at his shining vessels pointing heavenward from among the cactus. "Considering the low escape velocity of Mars, I should say they would lift ten tons each."

"Good." Mura hopped up. "I shall give orders immediately that thirty tons of gold are to be loaded in your ships. You won't even have to touch it, except to assay it for purity, of course. It will be poor recompense for your labors in bridging the vast reaches of space but the best we grateful Martians can afford."

"Thirty tons!" The wheels in Brown's mind revolved madly. (Fifty dollars an ounce. Twelve ounces to the pound. Sixty thousand pounds. THIRTY-SIX MILLION DOLLARS!) He snatched at a new pipe and drained it at a gulp. "I think," he said vaguely, "that I should be getting back to the Titan. Duty calls, you know. Thanks for the luncheon. Thanks for everything." He stood up and smoothed his perfectly tailored uniform. "You will bring Newsome along later, won't you? You have the freedom of the flagship."

"I shall bring him soon," Mura licked his lips. "And one thing more, colonel—just a whim, you might say. Don't mention the terms of our contract in your communications. Let them come as a welcome surprise to our Terrestrial cousins when you reach home."

"Splendid idea!" Brown bared his white teeth. "Capital. Not a word!"

YOUR VISOR must be quite primitive if an expert is needed to operate it," said Mura as he and Bill walked across the scorched cactus toward the Titan late that afternoon. "However that may be, don't forget that I expect your complete cooperation."

"It isn't television," said Bill before

he could think anything else. "There are too many X's broadcast by the radio stars to permit it. We're lucky to get through, sometimes, with plain old-fashioned telegraphy."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Dot and dash stuff. Morse-International code. Like this: dit dit dit, dah, dit dit, dah dit, dah dit dah, dit, dit dah dit!"

"How extraordinary." The Pitaret fixed him with a calculating eye. "Translates into English, though, I gather. Would you run through the code?"

Grudgingly, Bill did so.

"Ah, I have memorized it." Mura kicked thoughtfully at a cactus stump, then added as he started up the gangplank. "You will notice that I am armed. An Ultra-heat, this little beauty is called. Radiates in the infra-red. If you try to doublecross me, I will toast you to a crisp."

Bill said nothing and thought dammit.

"One thing more. If any message should mention the quantity of gold being loaded, you will garble it."

"Garble is right." Bill counted the number of tractors busily trundling between the tower and the ships.

The Titan was a shambles. A few of the crew were dragging themselves about the decks like ghosts, but they were still too weak to clean ship.

The colonel was an exception. Impeccably uniformed, he welcomed them with just the proper austerity and led them directly to the radio room.

"Shouldn't I check with one of your operators?" Bill asked him.

"Not necessary. Same type transmitter you had on the First Expedtition. Tuned permanently to U.N. headquarters in New York. All you need do is send these messages and get out before I lose my temper."

"Very well. . .sir." Bill started flipping switches. As the tubes glowed in friendly response he put on a headphone set, plugged in another for Mura and adjusted a bug. It was a pleasure he had almost forgotten, that feel of the polished buttons between thumb and forefinger. As full power came on he began sending the well-remembered call letters: UN, UN, UN, M. UN, UN, UN, M. Dit dit dah, dah dit, dit dit dah, dah dit, dit dit dah, dah dit, dah dah.

Knowing there could be no immediate response, he limbered up his stiff fingers by rapping out the opening sentences of "The Gettysburg Address," his customary practice piece.

"You go too fast," muttered Mura, who was finding Morse more complicated than he had imagined. "What are you sending?"

" 'Four score and seven years ago,' " Bill quoted aloud as his fingers flew. (A first class telegrapher can send or receive, carry on a conversation and even read a book, all at the same time, so automatic have his responses become.) " 'our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.' "

"Noble sentiments," chirped the Pitaret mockingly.

"Well, if tain't ol' Gettysburg Bill," the headsets chattered faintly. Hwd u get up tr? Thot u wr ded. 73."

"Pi," Bill laughed back in code. "Tt u, Tom? Thot u'd be UN Sey by nw. 73."

"What are you saying? What are you saying?" Mura demanded as the ether grew silent again. (Three minutes for signals to reach Earth. Three more for an answer to return.)

"That was an old buddy of mine," Bill answered carelessly. "I recognized his fist, just as he knew mine. We were passing the time of day."

"Well stop it. Confine yourself to sending these messages," growled the colonel. "This occasion is too momentous for idle chatter. Here. This one's a Triple A. . . Reports our safe arrival. Then you'd better get this long one out. It's an eyewitness account of our reception. Written from a shock hammock, worse luck. Best our news man can provide just now."

"U ol sonofagun," the headset whis-

pered across 40 million miles of emptiness, "Bet u own Mars bi nw. Sa, u kw tt lil gal u met hr? She. . ."

"25" (Busy), Bill cut in. "Monitored." He looked at the glowering colonel as he sent that. "Ware flips." He chanced at reference to the time, years ago, when he had hazed Tom, a fledgling operator then, by reversing an occasional word in a long press release. "Dah, dah, dah dah, dah." (Message upcoming.)

Without waiting for an acknowledgment he started sending the Triple A slowly. Mura followed it, both mentally and by reading over his shoulder.

"Ack!" he concluded. "More. Over."

The snubbed man on the other end of the "line" sent a stiff acknowledgment.

MESSAGE after dull message followed as Brown kept pushing them ahead of the news story—reports on the health of the crews, amount of fuel remaining in the tanks, condition of the ships, etc., etc. Each received its glum okay from Tom.

Finally Bill swung into the eyewitness account:

"By Gerald Fortesque

"United Press Special Correspondent with the Second Martin Expedition.

"CROTAN, MARS, SEPT. 13—(Copyright 1975, by UPA)—History was made for the second time in four years today when three heroic rocket ships of the Second Martian Expedition set down safely in a dry sea bottom destnalp with nedlog-hued cactus at Crotan, underground capital of the mysterious, dying Red Planet."

("Boy, Gerald sure must be pretty sick if that's the best lead he can write," the sender commented with the faint disdain that all operators have for reporters.) The bug began picking up speed and shifted into the telegraphic shorthand of Phillips Code.

"CHB, fwd bi CEP & Lts. RD & AS ws fs dwn t gangplank & onto t scarlet soil. CHB's fs wds wr. . ."

In response to Mura's frantic wigwagging, Bill translated:

" 'Colonel Horace Brown, followed by Captain Earl Pierce and Lieutenants Robert Day and Adolph Simmons were first down the gangplank and onto the scarlet soil. Colonel Brown's first words were. . .' Look here, Fortesque has written about 5,000 words of this crap. We're going to be here for a week if you don't let me get moving, Pitaret. The despatch is right here in front of your eyes. Surely you can tell that I'm sending it word for word, even if I do cut it a bit."

"Let him finish, please," said the colonel. "I'm frightfully busy."

"Very well." Ashamed to admit before mere Earthlings that he was in trouble with his newly-acquired telegraphy, Mura stared at the typescript and whipped his mind into a mad dash after those flying "dit dah's."

Bill focussed his own attention to a scintillating point and raced the bug madly, 65 words to the minute, trying to think of nothing but the copy, yet, with one tiny corner of his mind watching his chance. . .watching his chance!

". . .wr: QN: Mars at last: A hope byd t shadow o a dream. Much hv I travelld d realms o dlog & many gdly states & kingdoms seen. QJ PN U get tt, Tom. Skeats. Ack. Over."

"It's tough, copying poetry, I mean," Bill explained to the others. "I want to be sure Tom got it down right."

"Ur nuts," whispered the earphones after six endless minutes, "but I tnk I savvy. GA."

"One hnd barrel-chested, downy red Martians, wrg wt ms hvb snot o dlog q harnesses, mchd out o Crotan to greet our brave ldr. . ."

"I'm getting it now. I'm getting it," breathed Mura, as delighted as a small boy with a new toy. "You're just abbreviating words and phrases. Why, it's music of a sort, isn't it . . . your telegraphy? Remarkable! But then, every once in a while it doesn't make sense for a flash. Why is that?"

"That's just the way it is," Bill answered without stopping the message. "Have to use your imagination. Tom's

copying ten or fifteen words behind. So when one of those X's hits, he can still figure out the sense of what I'm sending. There are probably five Voice of America reporters snatching that copy out of his mill, sentence by sentence."

On and on he raced, knowing that Tom was hanging onto the ropes at the other end, pounding his typewriter like a madman and probably swearing like one, too. But he dared not slow down now. If he did he would think. Automatically, he "flipped" the word "thirty" when it showed up in the copy. Since Fortesque had been quite impressed by all the gold in evidence on the welcoming committee, he had two more chances to flip that, too. . . Send! Burn him up. . . Page after page of the flowery typescript tumbled to the floor as he finished with it.

"30," he hammered, after the last word had been sent. "30. 30." (That means 'The End', Mura.) Ack. Over." Again the long, agonizing wait.

"Gotcha," whispered the phones after an eternity. "toity tonnelada gelt upcmg. Wow! Hold eyg. Whole UN's hr. Stand by for Flash. Dit, dit, dit, dit, dit, dit, dit, dit, dit dit, dit dit."

The paired dots continued for five minutes as Tom "held the wire." Then Bill started typing a message from Earth with trembling fingers. It bore no Triple A priority or fancy official superscription. It read, with cold deadliness: "BROWN, YOU INFINITE IDIOT. DUMP THOSE THIRTY TONS OF GOLD AND COME HOME AT ONCE! DO YOU WANT TO WRECK THE MARKET AND RUIN US? (SIGNED) "HARVARD Q. BATES, III, SECRETARY, UNITED NATIONS."

"Wd I love to be lkg at Brown's face," chortled Tom. "Ack. Ov."

Mura's weapon was out of his holster, wavering between the humans as though unable to decide which deserved to be crisped first. The Martian's thin dry lips were drawn over his teeth in an insane death's head grimace.

"I wouldn't." Bill tried to speak calmly. "Mars is going to have to live with Earth a long, long time."

"Do you give me permission to unload?" whimpered Brown. "I didn't think. . . ."

Mura laughed like a welk.

"Tell Bates that," whimpered Brown, as empty as an exploded paper bag.

"THEN TAKE IT OUT AND DUMP IT IN SPACE." came the Terrestrial command. "IF YOU TRY TO BRING IT HERE WE'LL SHOOT YOU DOWN."

"Tell him I can't jettison it," whimpered Brown. "We can only make the trip under Suspenso. Wake up the crews in mid-trip and the air would be gone before we got home. We'd all die of suffocation."

Bill told him.

"THEN GO TO VENUS AND DUMP IT IN A SWAMP! EARTH WON'T HAVE IT."

The Old Man was whipped . . . whipped into the ground, after that message came. He was so far gone that he made no objection when Bill, after signing off with a flourish, took advantage of the Earth-heavy air to light a cigarette in defiance of all regulations.

Mura, on the other hand, seemed to have forgotten his rage . . . seemed almost to have forgotten the presence of the humans. He was listening, his head on one side in that typically birdlike attitude. Slowly he relaxed and put the Ultra-heat away. Finally he began to laugh again, not wildly this time, but with a musical, breathless warble that soon had him leaning against a bulkhead in near-collapse.

"What does it matter?" he astounded them by asking as he wiped a tear from each golden eye. "I overplayed my hand, as you would say, but it was a good sabotage try and did not completely fail. Take back our gold, Colonel, and make kewpie dolls out of it, for all I care. Mars has its zirconium, and a contract is sacred, particularly when both parties have been gypped by it.

"Come along, you remarkable Double

X'r," he said to Bill, not in words but in fairly fluent "dit dahs." "I've just made contact with Yahna. She and Jack will be home tomorrow. We must prepare a royal welcome for them . . . and for the teleport they bring us."

VIII

ALL the lights of Crotan were turned on the following night, ending a dimout that had lasted for centuries. Unfortunately, the Second Expeditioners were not on hand to appreciate the glorious sight. Despite Mura's pleas that Colonel Brown stay until his men had fully recuperated, the Terrestrial ships had folded their gangplanks and thundered away, like noisy Arabs, into the frigid sky.

There was dancing—and flying by those who could—in the caverns. There was singing, and four-cornered lovemaking, and the weaving of cactus blossom garlands to crown the Princess, the humans, the Pitaret and even the battered teleport.

Weary as he was, and frostbitten too, Jack drank in the beauty of the softly-glowing avenues. He realized for the first time that Crotan occupied a series of natural caves, hewn out of limestone by underground streams in long-dead times. Many of the chambers still were roofed with parti-colored stalactites. Others had had their ceilings domed or arched as settings for breathtaking murals or intricate mosaics.

True, much of the rich ornamentation had disappeared from the soaring facades and the tessellated pavements. Thirty tons of gold, collected in a hurry, leave sizeable cavities. But, like the architecture and statuary of ancient Greece, the structures had assumed a new, severe beauty when stripped of their gauds. And the joy of the red people at being reprieved, even temporarily, from a nagging death, made the scars of no importance.

Half asleep in the unaccustomed warmth of the city, the humans drank more Gurlak than was necessary and had a wonderful time. Mura and Yahna bowed or lifted wing tips to the cheering throngs as they rode on floats improvised from newly-activated motor vehicles. Little Awoni sat at the feet of the great ones, basking in reflected glory. Only Kawl was absent—he had a broken leg.

When it was all over and the lights had been dimmed again, until more atomic generators could be activated with Second Expedition zirconium, Harkness and Newsome sat in their apartment and fuzzily compared notes.

Jack laughed until tears came at the colonel's discomfiture.

"The Old Man is just fool enough to dump that gold in plain sight on Venus," he chuckled.

"Then some other fools like us will come along, dig the stuff out and start the merry-go-round turning again," was Bill's glum rejoinder.

"No," said Jack lazily. "Mura was way off-center on that deal. With Uncle Sam holding about thirty billion dollars worth of gold at Fort Knox, I doubt that thirty-six Martian millions more would be really disastrous. I'm onto something much better than that, chum. Did you know that our friends here grow all sorts of plastics, practically ready to use, right out of the ground? Some trick with enzymes and grafting of crystals. Yahna told me about it."

"So what?" Bill, the eternal pessimist, had stretched himself, fully clothed, on some cushions and was starting to doze off. "It is much cheaper to make plastics in a factory."

"It is *if* you have plenty of cheap fuel, and *if* you have the raw materials. One of these days, though, Earth, like Mars, is going to have plenty of nothing but sunshine and soil. Even good soil may run short, the way we're washing it down our rivers."

"Okay," Bill said. "Let's buy a Terrestrial concession on the process from the Anarchiate. Probably get it dirt cheap. Our collective grandchildren might cash in on it." He wriggled into a

more comfortable position and gave a preliminary snore.

"That reminds me. Where and what is this Anarchiate? Except for Mura and his cops, we haven't met a single government official since we've been here. You know what?"

"What?" His friend opened one eye with great effort.

"I don't think Mars *has* any government. Those cops don't do anything but look chesty and drill when Mura yells at them. There's no crime that I've heard about. Martians just naturally behave themselves. *I* think the whole crazy planet is running on momentum!"

"In tha' case, no concession, no plastic sprouts, no rich gran'chillen."

"That also reminds me." Jack shook the other with considerable vigor. "What did you mean by *collective* grandchildren? If you still think you're going to edge in on my love life. . . ."

"G'way," muttered Bill, turning his face to the wall. "Le'me sleep, will you? Gotta li'l chick all my own now."

MURA dragged them out of their slumbers early. "My best engineers are working around the clock getting the breeders back in shape," he said worriedly. "The others take one look at the teleport and throw up their hands. It's completely beyond their experience and there are no instruction tapes extant. I need your help."

"Why come to barbarians like us?" grumbled Jack. He was in the so-called bathroom trying to shave with the half cup of water that finally had been allotted to him.

"Well, it's an instrument of communication, it operates according to the principles of physical chemistry and it's archaic. You humans are archaic and you're also devilishly ingenious."

"How can you trust us after the way I crossed you up?" Bill wanted to know.

"Gentlemen," cried Mura in his best Colonel Brown manner, "I cannot condemn Mr. Newsome for his brilliant subterfuge. He did only what I would have tried to do in his place. Patriotism, sirs. True patriotism. I deserved what I got.

"On the other hand," he licked his lips, "you shouldn't condemn me for that unfortunate episode. I, too, was acting as a patriot. I was doing my bit to protect poor old dying Mars from threatened aggression by a stronger power."

"Oh come off it," said Jack. "Let me put Bill's question in reverse: Why should we trust you *now?*"

"Because I am still acting as a patriot. I'm trying to place my people forever beyond the reach of aggression. You don't deny, do you, that in the long run Earth will dominate Mars? Her population and resources exceed ours, a hundred to one, and she must expand or die."

"It could be," they agreed uncomfortably.

"Well then," beamed the Pitaret, "you must trust and help me because I am trying to reopen a path to the stars—to new and fertile planets where both of our races may find living space." He led them to a laboratory where the teleport had been housed and opened the round door with a gesture. "Here it is," he cried. "Where do we start on it? Polaris, Sirius and Vesta are calling."

"I should think," said Bill practically, "that we ought to scrape off the dust of ages first. No wonder it won't work."

The Earthlings took off their coats, rolled up their sleeves and got busy. Mura made half-hearted efforts to help but merely got in the way. They shooed him off to find tools and materials. Awoni wandered in later in the morning, watched them swab and scrape for a time, then curled up and went to sleep.

By the time they were down to the cabinet's bare metal and had scrubbed up the meaningless electric circuits printed on its control panel, Yahna also appeared.

"I know all about it," she said, seeing their puzzlement. "The Avron told me. You just push this lever, turn these three dials like this to select the proper channel, and gooooooo!"

"Go where?" inquired Bill.

"I hadn't thought about that!" She looked at him, round-eyed.

"And what do we use for power?" Jack was studying silver bus bars, big around as his arms, that led nowhere. "I'd say the imput is about equal to all of the generators at Niagara falls. Mura, do you have a million kilowatts?"

"Electricity?" puzzled Mura. "Why, I'm not an engineer. I—"

"Well—dammit!" Jack yelled at him. "Got *get* us an engineer, an electrician, three mathematicians and somebody who can make sense out of the chicken tracks printed on these verniers.

"And Yahna," he added in even more uncivilized tones, "put that transistor right back where you found it! If you break it we'll have to invent a time machine to take us back to the age when someone knew how to build a replacement."

"I'm not hurting anything," she wailed. "And I'm a Princess. I have just as much right as you have to play with it."

" 'Alouette,' " he crooned. " 'Pretty Alouette, I shall pluck your tail-feathers.' "

"I don't like you," she chirped right back. "I don't like your song. I don't like your diseased sense of humor. I don't like that freckle on your nose!"

She made a grab for that rather prominent member. He retaliated by stepping on her many toes. She flew at him like an enraged mother hen.

"Children! Children!" shrieked Mura. "Stop fighting this instant or I will put you all under arrest."

"Just try to arrest me, you atavistic pipsqueak!" Yahna dabbed at the two tears in her eyes with a bit of oily waste and succeeded in smearing her beauty right out of the park. "I'm here and here I'm going to stay. If you make me go I'll appeal to the Anarchiate!"

"Have it your way, Princess." Mura was suddenly meek. "How many mathematicians did you say you needed, Jack?"

THE next week was one of unremitting toil as they tried to make sense out of that machine. Only the fact that it *was* primitive enabled them to get anywhere at all. The Martian scientists they called into consultation were uniformly baffled.

"All I can make out is that it warps space somehow," said a wisp of a physicist, so old that the down on his wrinkled skin was snow white. "Space, of course, is like a toy balloon. Galaxies are scattered over its surface, almost as if they were painted on. With almost unlimited power you might pinch two parts of that surface together momentarily. Then the teleport would become a door through which you could step from Mars to some planet circling Polaris, Sirius, Vesta or . . . hmmm . . . this third dial is set for Earth and the fifth for Venus."

"But how would you know when you were on target, so to speak?" Bill asked with a shudder, thinking of the light-year distances involved.

"Oh, that's simple, the Avron said," Yahna piped up. (She had taken over the simple task of disassembling, cleaning and putting back together the toggles and other corrosion-jammed switches on the control panel and, oddly enough, handled it with competence.) "The Avron said you just open the teleport door and look through. If you're there, why you are. If you're *not* there, you slam the door and bolt it . . . if you have time."

Trouble was that, when all the atomic furnaces of Crotan got back into production, when they threw the indicated wattage into the machine, the bus bars fused and spewed molten silver over the laboratory floor. But the interior of the teleport remained obstinately black.

They tried again and again, recasting the bars each time. They checked circuits and crystal controls. They swore. The white-furred Martian even wept. Then, as the breaking point approached, they went down into Crotan and got mildly stewed on Gurlak.

Jack dropped into the habit of attending the evening Theatredrome ritual. There he would sit in the dim auditorium as the sun sank and watch the aerial weaving of the indefatigable Princess and her chorus until he got a crick in his neck. Afterwards he would climb to Yahna's preening room and listen to her chatter until his taut nerves relaxed. Sometimes the other flyers would drop in but they were so dedicated to their esoteric art that he never became really acquainted with them. Sometimes Bill, Awoni and the convalescent Kawl joined them, but usually the only intruder was little Sauk, the maid.

"Is there an Anarchiate, honest now, Yahna?" he asked one night when she had become silent for once.

"Of course." She was touching up fingernails chipped by hard work, with that amazing flame stuff.

"Where is it?" He insisted. "You can't tell me the Pitaret is allowed to run everything just as he pleases. Don't you have a Congress or anything to make decisions?"

"What decisions?"

"Well, like what's to be done with the teleport."

"You just attended a meeting of the Anarchiate," she smiled. "Didn't you know?"

"Didn't I know what?"

"Oh, I keep forgetting you're not telepathic. The Ritual . . . the Flight . . . serves to focus the thoughts of everyone in the Auditorium, and, through them everyone on Mars who cares to participate on any important problem of well, art, or science, or logic, or, if we can't avoid it, of government. We're all in conference, as you so quaintly put it. Really, didn't you feel any of it, Jack? It's wonderful, that rapport. I couldn't live without it."

"Well," he said in some confusion, "it's pretty wonderful watching you fly, although I'll be damned if I can figure out how you stay up there."

"You're a dear, you poor dumb brute." She kissed him tenderly. "Now you had better run along and get some sleep. Big day tomorrow."

IT WAS on that tenth hectic day that the break came. Bill was responsible. During his endless checking of the printed circuits, working with a microscope now, the ex-c.o., found a break. He patched it with infinite care.

They fed power in. The machine hummed, like a cat full of canary. Its bus bars became white hot but did not spatter. The news spread through Crotan.

Mura, who had been off on the desert drilling his policemen, came running.

"Tune in the Sirius V channel for a test," he commanded, hopping from one foot to the other in his excitement.

Bill obeyed but nobody showed any interest in opening the teleport door. They all looked at Jack.

Feeling as if he were walking to his execution, he jerked it wide.

A blaze of light poured through the opening. They peered inside. A desert of yellowish sand, highlighted by one far-away oasis or mirage thereof, snarled back at them. Nothing moved under that brassy sky, but a hot, breatheable wind blew in, almost scorching their faces.

"Pfui!" Jack slammed the portal. "Now what, Mura?"

"Try Polaris III."

This time they looked out on nightmare. Three hurtling suns of different colors sent eye-twisting, actinic lights and shadows dancing over a wild mountain. Squatted at the exit port, almost as though it had been expecting visitors, was a diaphanous, faintly humanoid creature. Pointed ears and nose twitching, it surveyed the operators of the teleport with preternatural wisdom.

"What in God's name was that?" asked Jack as he closed the door gently.

"Pog, I believe they're called," laughed Yahna. "There are stories about them in the ancient tapes. Mars used to have a colony on Polaris III."

"Try the Terrestrial channel," Mura directed.

"We're going to burn out every generator in Crotan if we keep this up much longer," Bill warned. "Those bars are about ready to go."

"Try Earth!" The Pitaret licked his lips.

"Wups! We're back on Sirius V!" Jack started to slam the door.

"You're wrong," said Bill, squinting into the glare from another desert. "That's North Africa out there."

Jack looked more intently. Just before the tortured leads went out again, sending them all leaping for cover, he caught sight of a well-remembered long low ridge of sand. On it, white-garbed Arabs with shovels labored side by side with monstrous bulldozers, scooping out the channel that eventually would let water from the Mediterranean flow in and irrigate the Sahara.

"Let's celebrate," cried Yahna, flapping her wings delightedly. "Let's not even think of this silly old gadget until tomorrow. I'll clean up here . . . Jack. Bill. Go get into your heavy clothes. Mura, you get ready too, and don't talk back to your Princess. We're all going sandskiing!"

Well sandpapered, and with more aching ligaments than he had known were in his body, Bill slept late and limped into the laboratory the next morning to find it guarded by one of Mura's huskies.

"May I see your pass?" said the cop, in surprisingly good English.

"I don't need one."

"You'll have to wait until the Pitaret gets here, then. Orders."

He waited, fuming.

A measured tramp sounded down the corridor. Around a corner came Mura, resplendent in his best gold harness, arm in arm with Yahna. Jack followed, looking stunned. Then, in perfect order, marched the Crotan police force.

"Morning, Newsome," barked the Pitaret. "You're just in time for take-off."

"Why the rush and where?" Bill grinned uncertainly.

"Poor old dying Mars is invading Earth."

"Oh, come now," Bill chuckled. "Did you drink too much, too, last night?"

"No joke." Mura pointed to the last men in his company. They were trundling highpowered weapons of some kind mounted on bicycle-type wheels. "Must beat the Second Expedition home. . . . Set up a bridgehead where we know the country, near lost Atlantis." His eyes glittered and he licked his lips continuously.

"He's not kidding," said Jack. "I've been up for hours trying to tell him he's crazy. No use! He figures that with those atomic weapons, the English he has taught his cops and their ability to use telepathy, he can take over."

"Well, Earth's a big place," grunted Bill. "It's his funeral. I suppose you've told him we'll have no part of it."

"Oh, that's all right," Yahna spoke up. "You won't have to do anything unpatriotic. I can operate the teleport as well as you by this time. I've been watching."

"You!" The humans stared at her with loathing.

"I obey the will of the Anarchiate." She smoothed an out-of-place feather on her breast. "Mura and I planned this even before I went to the Avron. I'm sorry, Jack. Forgive me if you can. But poor old dying Mars comes first."

"Such patriotism," cooed the Pitaret. "Now you boys stand over there in the far corner and, what is it your detective stories say? 'Don't make a false move.'

"Princess, warm up the teleport!"

As she moved to the controls he turned briskly and shouted to his men in English:

"Attention! When the door opens, form single file and march through at the double, the way I showed you yesterday. We have half an hour before these silver bars burn out. Any one of you who isn't on Earth by then will be burned out, too. Understood? . . . Yahna, are you ready? Earth channel. That's the one!"

"Ready," she murmured. The laboratory lights dimmed like those in an execution chamber as she cut in full power.

Mura jerked open the teleport door, studied the blazing desert it revealed . . . the desert which nearly duplicated conditions on Mars . . . and brought his arm down in a Brownish gesture of command.

"Forward to Earrrrth and victorrrry!"

LIKE well-trained automata . . . Jack wondered dully if Mura had been feeding them on the same food the Avron gave to her Golden ids . . . the policemen trotted into the doorway. From his corner Jack could see a few of them lined up, their faces grim and blank, awaiting the arrival of their fuehrer.

"One, two, three," he counted, glancing alternately at the glowing bus bars and at the calmly efficient girl before the controls. "Twenty-one, two, three. . . ." Mura was insane, but insane men had changed world history before. "Two hundred and one, two, three . . ." Where were all the cops coming from? Mura must have stripped the town. "Eleven hundred ninety-seven, ninety-eight, nine. . . ." He was sweating as though he, too, were standing in desert sunshine. Twenty minutes had passed and the bars still held.

When they had all passed through except Mura, the Pitaret bowed mockingly to the humans.

"Since all I am, I owe to Colonel Brown," he winked, "let me take my temporary farewell by quoting his favorite lines from Keats:

" 'To one who has been long in city pent,
'Tis very sweet to look into the fair
And open face of heaven. . .
Hear ye not the hum
Of mighty workings?' "

He snapped a salute, stepped through the teleport and slammed the far door.

Yahna picked up a hammer from the floor and proceeded to smash every dial on the control panel!

"The Pitaret," she screamed at the astounding onlookers when she had quite finished the job, "should also have quoted Keats' epitaph:

" 'Here lies one whose name was writ on water.' "

She laughed a little and fainted. . . .

"But I'm damned if I understand why you smashed the panel," Jack said that evening after the Flight. He, Bill, Awoni, and a Yahna who was apparently no worse for wear, were in the preening room where gentle Sauk fluttered attentions on them. "So Mura and his men *are* marooned for a while. If their plans succeed, they can seize the ships of the Second Expedition and get back to Mars that way. Then I'd hate to be in your feathers."

"Not where they went, they can't." Yahna dusted her newly flame-tipped fingers together. "Even if he does find a space ship it will take him quite a number of light-years to get here in it."

"You mean. . . ." Bill leaped to his feet and stared at her as if she had started *breathing* fire.

"Of course, silly. Yesterday, while I was cleaning up the lab, I just shifted the "Earth" and "Sirius V" channel control dials. Mura saw me turn what looked to be the Earth Channel on, and all deserts look alike."

"And you didn't tell me," Jack stormed at her. "Why, if I had had a weapon I most certainly would have killed you."

"No you wouldn't. Long before that Mura would have picked the true facts out of your brain like a vulture. Bill can tell you how he does it."

"Why didn't you stop him sooner?"

"Why should we have done so? So long as Mura was working for Mars' benefit, the Anarchiate agreed to let him alone. Stopping him would have meant killing him . . . and we don't murder. As soon as we repair the teleport we'll even take an occasional peek at him. Maybe, if he behaves himself, out there in that Sirium hell's kitchen, we'll let him return some day. After all, he is just a dumb cluck . . . isn't that the expression?"

"In the meantime," said Bill, "what about all of us?"

"Now that the Pitaret is on leave, so to speak," sighed the Princess, "I'm titular head of the Anarchiate. I must spend my life caring for poor old dying Mars."

"Nuts!" said Jack, and then wished he had paid a more poetic farewell to his dreams.

"Bill," she went on, "why don't you stay here a while, figure out how the teleport really works and learn our way of growing plastics? That will give you time to get better acquainted with Awoni, too."

"Impossible," said Awoni, looking up from the 'vision screen. "The last part, I mean."

"That calls for another drink, I guess," said Jack with a wry smile. "I suppose, Princess, you have it all figured out that I will refuel our ship and head out alone for Pluto or someplace. Not a very cheerful prospect, I must say.

"You know," he added, staring at his lost love over the Gurlak and trying to blink back his tears, "Colonel Brown isn't the only human who can quote poetry. I prefer old Omar to Keats, though:

> 'Come, fill the cup and in the fire of spring
> Your winter garment of repentence fling.
> The bird of time has but a little way
> To flutter . . . and the bird is on the wing.' "

" 'The bird of time,' " whispered Yahna. "You called me that the first time we met. Now I know why."

"Yes," he nodded. "I memorized that quatrain when I was a lonely boy on a run-down Indiana farm. It haunted me, as did the rest of the poem, with glimpses of a rich, full life, so different from the narrow Puritanism I had been brought up in. It drove me out into space, searching for something I couldn't live without. I thought that 'something' could be bought if I got rich enough, no matter how. I was a fool."

"I've been a fool, too." Yahna, hands pressed to cheeks suddenly grown pale, was talking directly to herself. "I'm just a bird . . . out of the beginning of time . . . trying to be a workaday princess . . . although I have 'but a little way to flutter.' "

She bent her head and sat for long moments in the hush of the dim room.

At last she sprang up proudly; swept her wings to the star spangled ceiling until she loomed over them like a Victory.

"Jack," she cried, "how long will it take to refuel and provision your ship?"

"Two days," he answered glumly. "Why? In a rush to get rid of me?"

"To get rid of *us*," she sang wildly, and added a defiant rhyme: "Martians are broadminded and they're fond of me, but they just don't cater to monogamy!

"So we're going to elope, my darling. We'll go out among the stars together. Your bird of time refuses to flutter. She's going to soar!"

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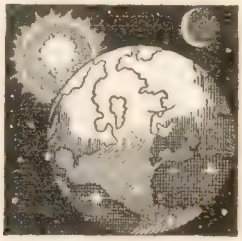

PART IX—Earths of Other Suns

By JAMES BLISH

ANY survey of the possibilities for life in our solar system—even a rather optimistic one, such as ours has been—is bound to leave the hopeful reader feeling a little depressed. The chances for life really seem to be so small, and the number of worlds habitable by man so much smaller. . . .

But our sun is only one of an estimated twenty or thirty billion suns in our own galaxy alone, among an uncounted—but appallingly large—number of other galaxies. Do other stars support families of planets, too? If so, how many of them do? And are we just as unlikely to find life on such planets as we are in our own solar system?

Up until about a decade ago, the answer to the first, crucial question would have been: "Probably not." Although no one then knew, any more than we know now, just how solar systems are formed, the theory that was most popular was one involving the collision or near-collision of two stars. Since stars are normally isolated from each other by inconceivably huge mileages, a little figure work showed that the collision which was supposed to have formed our system must have been the happiest and most unlikely sort of accident.

This meant that there could be only a few solar systems like ours in the galaxy, perhaps only a few in the entire cosmos. This melancholy conclusion led the famous science-fiction writer Dr. E. E. Smith to suggest that our galaxy and the next nearest major one (the Andromeda nebula) might once have passed through each other. Had that taken place, one might legitimately suspect that quite a number of near-collisions of stars had occurred during the passage. Since we do know of two galaxies which are side-swiping each other right now, this was not exactly a wild speculation, but it is certainly the biggest *IF* ever written into the pages of cosmology.

The collision hypothesis, however, turned out to have no more validity than all the many ideas on solar system formation that had preceded it. The theory which is most widely accepted at present is a condensation theory, distantly related to Laplace's nebular hypothesis. While it is full of bugs, it does at least allow for a large number of

Are We the Only Humanoids in the Cosmos?

solar systems other than ours.

Recent popular books, however, have been responsible for circulating some misconceptions on our present state of knowledge of extra-solar planets. Since the subject is important, and will become more so in succeeding years, it would be just as well to get the material straightened out.

For instance: In Donald Keyhoe's volume, *The Flying Saucers Are Real*—an honest job, by the way, though its conclusions are dubious because Keyhoe hadn't the scientific knowledge necessary to weigh the evidence—an Air Force release is quoted which sets the number of known extra-solar planet systems at 22. This is flatly wrong; nothing like that many are known at this writing.

Actually, only three planets or planetary bodies outside our solar system have been discovered so far, of which only two have been definitely validated. These are the planet of the star Wolf 359, and the body C of the star 61 Cygni. Both are immense bodies, and some astronomers prefer to think of them as small non-luminous stars or "gray ghosts"* rather than as planets; but the concensus is that they are planets—gas giants so huge that they are probably quite hot from sheer pressure.

Presumably what the Air Force did, in guessing at the number of extra-solar planets which *might* have served as home bases for flying saucers, was to count the number of reasonably near stars. Both 61 Cygni and Wolf 359 belong to the so-called "local group" of stars lying in a sphere 24 light years in diameter, with our sun at its center. This group also includes the Alpha Centauri system, Sirius, Procyon, Barnard's Star, Lalande 21185, Kruger 60, 40 Eridani and Altair. The sphere encloses a known 41 stars altogether, but if you count each double or multiple star system as just one "star," you come out with 26 "stars," or four more than the Air Force mentions. One wonders which four were shut out, and why.

*So far as I have been able to determine, this term was coined by Dr. R. S. Richardson of Mt. Palomar, who is incidentally a popular writer for science-fiction magazines.

200,000 Earths

Another recent popular study which sets the number of possible extra-solar planets enormously high is the account by Fred Hoyle of Cambridge of his own theory of how solar systems are born. This theory has been aired on the radio, both in this country and in England; it got a big plug from Time Magazine; it was described by Hoyle in a 1951 issue of Harper's; and a book on the subject, also by Hoyle, is now available.

Hoyle's theory in many respects is not greatly different from the current condensation theory. Its biggest departure from other theories is that it assumes that the original cloud of gas was formed by the explosion of a star—a nova. It further assumes that almost all stars were originally components of double or multiple star systems, and that all stars now solitary must now have planetary systems.

We haven't the space to examine Hoyle's theory closely here; as a matter of fact nobody has had the opportunity to subject it to rigorous analysis so far. Hoyle is a British example of a phenomenon which has been cropping up with disturbing frequency in recent years: the proponent of a theory who appeals, over the heads of fellow students in his field, for the support of the layman. L. Ron Hubbard is the best known American example. Hoyle's professional reputation is more secure than was Hubbard's, but in both cases the conclusions were published popularly, together with large claims for their merits, *before* the evidence for the conclusions and the procedures used in analyzing that evidence were offered to scientists.

While we're waiting for the dust to settle, we can note here that to the best of our knowledge only about 52 percent of the stars in the universe are compo-

nents of double or multiple systems, and Hoyle has yet to show us any reason for thinking that this has not always been the case. His estimates on the number of planets existing outside our system, therefore, have to be taken with at least some grains of salt.

Nevertheless, it is now pretty generally accepted that the formation of planets must be a natural part of a star's life-cycle, rather than an unlikely catastrophe. If we estimate cautiously that one star in every hundred in our own galaxy (to which we shall confine our discussion, in order to make any sense at all—it is impossible to compute on the basis of *all* the stars in the universe; the figure cannot even be estimated) has planets circling it, that would give us a conservative figure of 200 million planetary systems. Similarly, if we assume that only one star in every thousand supports an Earth-like planet, that still leaves us with—

200,000 Earths.

This estimate, furthermore, has been arrived at without recourse to *any* of the current speculations as to how solar systems get formed. Instead, it arises out of elementary statistical considerations:

Both of the "gray ghosts" revolve around stars which are very close to us, as stellar distances go. Wolf 359 is the fourth-nearest star to us, only 8 light years away; 61 Cygni is about 11 light years distant. We would not have detected either of the "gray ghosts" had they been satellites of stars much farther out.

This means that among the 41 suns lying inside a tiny sphere only 12 light years in radius, we already know of three different solar systems (counting our own, of course) and strongly suspect the existence of a fourth. If solar systems happened only by remote accident, the chances of so many accidents being concentrated in so small a space would be even more remote. Mathematically, the assumption is untenable.

If the distribution of stars and planets in this little sphere is typical—and astronomers think it is—then at least one star in every ten has planets! With this in mind, the reader can see why our estimate of one in every hundred was labelled "a conservative figure."*

And among these planets may be 200,000 Earth-like worlds—not "Earthlike" only in the astronomical sense, where the term also includes airless, parboiled Mercury, but specifically Earth-like enough to support human beings.

Are there human beings there, then?

Race to the Stars

Dr. Kuiper doesn't think so. In the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, he remarks:

"It would be very strange indeed if life on these distant planets, millions and billions of miles farther away than the Sun's most distant planet Pluto, should be at all similar to life as we know it here on Earth."

We disagree. The distances of these planets from *our* sun are irrelevant. If these planets are at distances from *their own suns* suitable for the maintenance of Earth-like conditions, then Earth-like life will almost inevitably arise; and the dominant form will be humanoid. A bipedal, upright form, with the brains concentrated at the upper end and served by binocular vision, is pro-survival. Similar conditions can be counted upon to produce similar results, regardless of how many millions of miles separate the two sets of conditions.

If there are as many other Earths as 200,000, however, it would at first seem that the Air Force's speculation about those saucers should have some truth in it. Given that many independent chances, at least one race of humanoids should have developed interstellar travel by now, if interstellar travel is possible at all. Why haven't we been visited, then? Or—have we?

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*Dr. Kuiper of Yerkes recently declared that *all* stars have planets; possibly he was misquoted, but if not the statement must have been made in a fit of uncontrollable enthusiasm.

Speculation on this question has produced thousands of science-fiction stories, as well as a number of fantasies masquerading as non-fiction, and it's difficult to deal with it solely in terms of known facts. There are, however, several apparent reasons why 200,000 humanoid civilizations might not yet have produced a single interstellar visit.

One of these reasons is the problem of distance. No science-fiction reader needs to be reminded that free traffic between the stars at finite speeds would require travellers with long life-spans. If Einstein is right, the speed of light is the top speed attainable by any energy anywhere in the universe, and a speed which any mass may approach but may never actually reach. That speed, about 186,000 miles per second, is far too slow to permit anything but local travel between stars, except for a race of people who don't care whether or not it takes them a life-span or thirty life-spans to make the trip.

This speed limitation has recently been called into question by the New Relativity; but the chief exponent of that relativity, the late Prof. Milne, has suggested an even more serious reason why we have not yet been visited by inhabitants of extra-solar earths. Milne relativity is extraordinarily complicated, but one of its less esoteric propositions is that all known astronomical bodies are of exactly the same age in terms of the energy-level of the cosmos. (Admittedly the proposition is difficult to grasp, but the British astronomer J. B. S. Haldane has made an excellent case for it.) This means that life probably arose throughout the cosmos almost simultaneously, and that the evolutionary levels existing everywhere at the present time must be comparable to ours.

Just as one country often gets considerably ahead of another in the development of some specific science or technique, so Earth-like planets of the same age might also show differences in their rate of progress toward practicable interstellar flight. The problem of space travel, however, is not a one-science problem; the techniques necessary require a high degree of advancement in all sciences (including, one suspects, the social sciences). Differences in rates of advance in just one or two of these fields would tend to be cancelled out by individual lags in other fields.

On 200,000 Earths, then, men or manlike races are still looking upward at the stars, still wondering how to reach them. If Milne and Haldane are right, the race to the stars will wind up in a dead heat.

It should be noted again here, however, that our galaxy alone is a huge place, and the Earth less than a dust-mote in it. It is perfectly possible also that interstellar travel may have been going on, on a large scale, for centuries without any of the travellers having come near us or suspected our existence. Among other things, our sun is not in our galaxy's main concentration of stars, but instead rather far out toward the edge.

Or perhaps interstellar travel over a wide field of stars will never be possible. If that turns out to be true—which we propose reluctantly, but with the knowledge that it may be a hard fact we should be forced to accept—we may at least expect that the human race will not disappear before it has established contact with as many as four Earths of other suns.

Coming Next Issue

A PLANET IN DOUBT

Concluding "Our Inhabited Universe"

By JAMES BLISH

A Magnus Ridolph Novelet

THE KOKOD

I

MAGNUS RIDOLPH sat on the Glass Jetty at Providencia, fingering a quarti-quartino of Blue Ruin. At his back rose Granatee Head; before him spread Mille-Iles Ocean and the myriad little islands, each with its trees and neo-classic villa. A magnificent blue sky extended overhead; and his feet, under the glass floor of the jetty, lay Coral Canyon, with schools of sea-moths flashing and flickering like metal snow-flakes. Magnus Ridolph sipped his liqueur and considered a memorandum from his bank describing a condition barely distinguishable from poverty.

He had been perhaps too trusting with his money. A few months previously, the Outer Empire Investment and Realty Society, to which he had entrusted a considerable sum, was found to be bankrupt. The Chairman of the Board and the General Manager, a Mr. See and a Mr. Holpers, had been paying each other unexpectedly large salaries, most of which had been derived from Magnus Ridolph's capital investment.

Magnus Ridoph sighed, glanced at his liqueur. This would be the last of these; hereafter he must drink *vin ordinaire*, a fluid rather like tarragon vinegar, prepared from the fermented rind of a local cactus.

A waiter approached. "A lady wishes to speak to you, sir."

Magnus Ridolph preened his neat white beard. "Show her over, by all means."

The waiter returned; Magnus Ridolph's eyebrows went S-shape as he saw his guest: a woman of commanding presence, with an air of militant and dignified virtue. Her interest in Magnus Ridolph was clearly professional.

She came to an abrupt halt. "You are Mr. Magnus Ridolph?"

He bowed. "Will you sit down?"

The woman rather hesitantly took a seat. "Somehow, Mr. Ridoph, I expected someone more—well. . . ."

Magnus Ridolph's reply was urbane. "A younger man, perhaps? With conspicuous biceps, a gun on his hip, a space helmet on his head? Or perhaps my beard alarms you?"

"Well, not exactly that, but my business—"

"Ah, you came to me in a professional capacity."

"Well, yes. I would say so."

WARRIORS

By JACK VANCE

That suave, dignified rascal was hired to stop the gambling racket at Shadow Valley Inn . . . where men wagered on war in miniature!

IN SPITE of the memorandum from his bank—which now he folded and tucked into his pocket—Magnus Ridolph spoke with decision. "If your business requires feats of physical prowess, I beg you hire elsewhere. My janitor might satisfy your needs: an excellent chap who engages his spare time moving bar-bells from one elevation to another."

"No, no," said the woman hastily. "I'm sure you misunderstand; I merely pictured a different sort of individual. . . ."

Magnus Ridolph cleared his throat. "What is your problem?"

"Well—I am Martha Chickering, secretary of the Women's League Committee for the Preservation of Moral Values. We are fighting a particularly disgraceful condition that the law refuses to abate. We have appealed to the better nature of the persons involved, but I'm afraid that financial gain means more to them than decency."

"Be so kind as to state your problem."

"Are you acquainted with the world—" she spoke it as if it were a social disease "—Kokod?"

Magnus Ridolph nodded gravely, stroked his neat white beard. "Your problem assumes form."

"Can you help us then? Every right-thinking person condemns the goings-on—brutal, undignified, nauseous . . ."

Magnus Ridolph nodded. "The exploitation of the Kokod natives is hardly commendable."

"Hardly commendable!" cried Martha Chickering. "It's despicable! It's trafficking in blood! We execrate the sadistic beasts who patronize bull-fights—but we condone, even encourage the terrible things that take place on Kokod while Holpers and See daily grow wealthier."

"Ha, ha!" exclaimed Magnus Ridolph. "Bruce Holpers and Julius See?"

"Why yes." She looked at him questioningly. "Perhaps you know them?"

Magnus Ridolph sat back in his chair, turned the liqueur down his throat. "To some slight extent. We had what I believe is called a business connection. But no matter, please continue. Your problem has acquired a new dimension, and beyond question the situation is deplorable."

"Then you agree that the Kokod Syndicate should be broken up? You will help us?"

Magnus Ridolph spread his arms in a fluent gesture. "Mrs. Chickering, my good wishes are freely at your disposal; active participation in the crusade is another matter and will be determined by the fee your organization is prepared to invest."

"Mrs. Chickering spoke stiffly. "Well, we assume that a man of principle might be willing to make certain sacrifices—"

Magnus Ridolph sighed. "You touch me upon a sensitive spot, Mrs. Chickering. I shall indeed make a sacrifice. Rather than the extended rest I had promised myself, I will devote my abilities to your problem . . . Now let us discuss my fee—no, first, what do you require?"

"We insist that the gaming at Shadow Valley Inn be halted. We want Bruce Holpers and Julius See prosecuted and punished. We want an end put to the Kokod wars."

Magnus Ridolph looked off into the distance and for a moment was silent. When at last he spoke, his voice was grave. "You list your requirements on a descending level of feasibility."

"I don't understand you, Mr. Ridolph."

"Shadow Valley Inn might well be rendered inoperative by means of a bomb or an epidemic of Mayerheim's Bloat. To punish Holpers and See, we must demonstrate that a non-existent law has been criminally violated. And to halt the Kokod wars, it will be necessary to alter the genetic heritage, glandular make-up, training, instinct, and general outlook on life, of each of the countless Kokod warriors."

Mrs. Chickering blinked and stammered; Magnus Ridolph held up a

courteous hand. "However, that which is never attempted never transpires; I will bend my best efforts to your requirements. My fee—well, in view of the altruistic ends in prospect, I will be modest: a thousand munits a week and expenses. Payable, if you please, in advance."

MAGNUS RIDOLPH left the jetty, mounted Granatee Head by steps cut into the green-veined limestone. On top, he paused by the wrought-iron balustrade to catch his breath and enjoy the vista over the ocean. Then he turned and entered the blue lace and silver filigree lobby of the Hotel des Mille Iles.

Presenting a bland face to the scrutiny of the desk clerk, he sauntered into the library, where he selected a cubicle, settled himself before the mnemiphot. Consulting the index for Kokod, he punched the appropriate keys.

The screen came to life. Magnus Ridolph inspected first a series of charts which established that Kokod was an exceedingly small world of high specific gravity.

Next appeared a projection of the surface, accompanied by a slow-moving strip of descriptive matter.

Although a small world, Kokod's gravity and atmosphere make it uniquely habitable for men. It has never been settled due to an already numerous population of autochthones and a lack of valuable minerals.

Tourists are welcomed at Shadow Valley Inn, a resort hotel at Shadow Valley. Weekly packets connect Shadow Valley Inn with Starport.

Kokod's most interesting feature is its population.

The chart disappeared, to be replaced by a picture entitled, "Typical Kokod Warrior (from Rock River Tumble)", and displaying a man-like creature two feet tall. The head was narrow and peaked; the torso was that of a bee—long, pointed, covered with yellow down. Scrawny arms gripped a four-foot lance, a stone knife hung at the belt. The chitinous legs were shod with barbs. The creature's expression was mild, almost reproachful.

A voice said, "You will now hear the voice of Sam 192 Rock River."

The Kokod warrior inhaled deeply; wattles beside his chin quivered. From the mnemiphot screen issued a high-pitched stridency. Interpretation appeared on a panel to the right.

"I am Sam 192, squadronite, Company 14 of the Advance Force, in the service of Rock River Tumble. Our valor is a source of wonder to all; our magnificent stele is rooted deep, and exceeded in girth only by the steles of Rose Slope Tumble and crafty Shell Strand Tumble.

"This day I have come at the invitation of the (untranslatable) of Small Square Tumble, to tell of our victories and immensely effective strategies."

ANOTHER sound made itself heard: a man speaking falsetto in the Kokod language. The interpretation read:

Question: Tell us about life in Rock River Tumble.

Sam 192: It is very companionable.

Q: What is the first thing you do in the morning?

A: We march past the matrons, to as-

Man of the Universe

IN THE years since Magnus Ridolph began his sleuthing in the pages of TWS he has become quite a personality. His latest triumph is the breaching of the gates of Hollywood, HARD LUCK DIGGINGS having been bought for a picture by 20th Century-Fox. Our impeccable goateed dandy will shortly burst upon the dazzled vision of millions who will undoubtedly never recognize the Hollywood version from any description offered by a science fiction fan conversant with the original.

Meanwhile, to tide you over until that day, here is a new and rather more rollicking adventure of the imperturbable Mr. Ridolph. Disaster skirts his heels as always, but triumph and cash are the twin goals which beckon him onward, ever onward.

—The Editor

sure ourselves of a properly martial fecundity.

Q: What do you eat?

A: We are nourished in the fields. (Note: The Kokod metabolism is not entirely understood; apparently they ferment organic material in a crop, and oxidize the resultant alcohols.)

Q: Tell us about your daily life.

A: We practice various disciplines, deploy in the basic formations, hurl weapons, train the kinderlings, elevate the veterans.

Q: How often do you engage in battle?

A: When it is our time: when the challenge has issued and the appropriate Code of Combat agreed upon with the enemy.

Q: You mean, you fight in various styles?

A: There are 97 conventions of battle which may be employed: for instance, Code 48, by which we overcame strong Black Glass Tumble, allows the lance to be grasped only by the left hand and permits no severing of the leg tendons with the dagger. Code 69, however, insists that the tendons must be cut before the kill is made and the lances are used thwart-wise, as bumpers.

Q: Why do you fight? Why are these wars?

A: Because the steles of the other tumbles would surpass ours in size, did we not fight and win victories.
(Note: the stele is a composite tree growing in each tumble. Each victory is celebrated by the addition of a shoot, which joins and augments the main body of the stele. The Rock River Stele is 17 feet in diameter, and is estimated to be 4,000 years old. The Rose Slope Stele is 18 feet in diameter, and the Shell Strand Stele is almost 20 feet in diameter.)

Q: What would happen if warriors from Frog Pond Tumble cut down Rock River Stele?

Sam 192 made no sound. His wattles blew out, his head bobbed. After a moment he turned, marched out of view.

Into the screen came a man wearing shoulder tabs of Commonwealth Control. He looked after Sam 192 with an expression of patronizing good humor that Magnus Ridolph considered insufferable.

"The Kokod warriors are well known through the numerous sociological studies published on Earth, of which the most authoritative is perhaps the Carlisle Foundation's *Kokod: A Militaristic Society,* mnemiphot code AK-SK-RD-BP.

"To summarize, let me state that there are 81 tumbles or castles, on Kokod, each engaged in highly formalized warfare with all the others. The evolutionary function of this warfare is the prevention of overpopulation on a small world. The Tumble Matrons are prolific, and only these rather protean measures assure a balanced ecology.

"I have been asked repeatedly whether the Kokod warriors fear death? My belief is that identification with the home tumble is so intense that the warriors have small sense of individuality. Their sole ambition is winning battles, swelling the girth of their stele and so glorifying their tumble."

The man spoke on. Magnus Ridolph reached out, speeded up the sequence.

ON THE screen appeared Shadow Valley Inn—a luxurious building under six tall parasol trees. The commentary read: "At Shadow Valley Inn, genial co-owners Julius See and Bruce Holpers greet tourists from all over the universe."

Two cuts appeared—a dark man with a lowering broad face, a mouth uncomfortably twisted in a grin; the other, lanky, with a long head sparsely thatched with red excelsior. "See" and "Holpers" read the sub-headings.

Magnus Ridolph halted the progression of the program, studied the faces for a few seconds, then allowed the sequence to continue.

"Mr. See and Mr. Holpers," ran the

script, "have ingeniously made use of the incessant wars as a means of diverting their guests. A sheet quotes odds on each day's battle—a pastime which arouses enthusiasm among sporting visitors."

Magnus Ridolph turned off the mnemiphot, sat back in the chair, stroked his beard reflectively. "Where odds exist," he said to himself, "there likewise exists the possibility of upsetting the odds . . . Luckily my obligation to Mrs. Chickering will in no way interfere with a certain measure of subsidiary profits. Or better, let us say, recompense."

II

ALIGHTING from the Phoenix Line packet, the *Hesperornis*, Ridolph was startled momentarily by the close horizons of Kokod. The sky seemed to begin almost at his feet.

Waiting to transfer the passengers to the inn was an over-decorated charabanc. Magnus Ridolph gingerly took a seat, and when the vehicle lurched forward, a heavy woman scented with musk was thrust against him. "Really!" complained the woman.

"A thousand apologies," replied Magnus Ridolph, adjusting his position. "Next time I will take care to move out of your way."

The woman brushed him with a contemptuous glance and turned to her companion, a woman with the small head and robust contour of a peacock.

"Attendant!" the second woman called presently.

"Yes, Madame."

"Tell us about these native wars, we've heard so much about them."

"They're extremely interesting, Madame. The little fellows are quite savage."

"I hope there's no danger for the onlookers?"

"None whatever; they reserve their unfriendliness for each other."

"What time are the excursions?"

"I believe the Ivory Dune and the Eastern Shield Tumbles march tomorrow; the scene of battle no doubt will center around Muscadine Meadow, so there should be three excursions. To catch the deployments, you leave the inn at 5 A.M.; for the onslaught, at 6 A.M.; and at 7 or 8 for the battle proper."

"It's ungodly early," the matron commented. "Is nothing else going on?"

"I'm not certain, Madame. The Green Ball and the Shell Strand might possibly war tomorrow, but they would engage according to Convention 4, which is hardly spectacular."

"Isn't there anything close by the inn?"

"No, Madame, Shadow Valley Tumble only just finished a campaign against Marble Arch, and are occupied now in repairing their weapons."

"What are the odds on the first of these—The Ivory Dune and the Eastern Shield?"

"I believe eight gets you five on Ivory Dune, and five gets you four on Eastern Shield."

"That's strange. Why aren't the odds the same both ways?"

"All bets must be placed through the inn management, Madame."

The carry-all rattled into the courtyard of the inn. Magnus Ridolph leaned forward. "Kindly brace yourself, Madame; the vehicle is about to stop, and I do not care to be held responsible for a second unpleasant incident."

The woman made no reply. The charabanc, halted; Magnus Ridolph climbed to the ground. Before him was the inn and behind a mountainside, dappled with succulent green flowers on lush violet bushes. Along the ridge grew tall slender trees like poplars, vivid black and red. A most colorful world, decided Magnus Ridolph, and turning, inspected the view down the valley. There were bands and layers of colors—pink, violet, yellow, green, graying into a distant dove color. Where the mouth of the valley gave on the river peneplain, Magnus Ridolph glimpsed a tall conical edifice. "One of

the tumbles?" he inquired of the charabanc attendant.

"Yes sir—the Meadow View Tumble. Shadow Valley Tumble is further up the valley, behind the inn."

Magnus Ridolph turned to enter the inn. His eyes met those of a man in a severe black suit—a short man with a dumpy face that looked as if it had been compressed in a vise. Ridolph recognized the countenance of Julius See. "Well, well, this is a surprise indeed," said Magnus.

See nodded grimly. "Quite a coincidence. . . ."

"After the unhappy collapse of Outer Empire Realty and Investment I feared —indeed, I dreaded—that I should never see you again." And Magnus Ridolph watched Julius See with mild blue eyes blank as a lizard's.

"No such luck," said See. "As a matter of fact I run this place. Er, may I speak to you a moment inside?"

"Certainly, by all means."

RIDOLPH followed his host through the well-appointed lobby into an office. A thin-faced man with thin red hair and squirrel teeth rose quickly to his feet. "You'll remember my partner, Bruce Holpers," said See with no expression in his voice.

"Of course," said Ridolph. "I am flattered that you honor me with your personal attention."

See cut the air with his hand—a small petulant gesture. "Forget the smart talk, Ridolph . . . What's your game?"

Magnus Ridolph laughed easily. "Gentlemen, gentlemen—"

"Gentlemen my foot! Let's get down to brass tacks. If you've got any ideas left over from that Outer Empire deal, put them away."

"I assure you—"

"I've heard stories about you, Ridolph, and what I brought you in to tell you was that we're running a nice quiet place here, and we don't want any disturbance."

"Of course not," agreed Ridolph.

"Maybe you came for a little clean fun, betting on these native chipmunks; maybe you came on a party that we won't like."

Ridolph held out his hands guilelessly. "I can hardly say I'm flattered. I appear at your inn, an accredited guest; instantly you take me aside and admonish me."

"Ridolph," said See, "you have a funny reputation, and a normal sharpshooter never knows what side you're working on."

"Enough of this," said Magnus sternly. "Open the door, or I shall institute a strong protest."

"Look," said See ominously, "we own this hotel. If we don't like your looks, you'll camp out and rustle your own grub until the next packet—which is a week away."

Magnus Ridolph said coldly, "You will become liable to extensive damages if you seek to carry out your threat; in fact, I defy you, put me out if you dare!"

The lanky red-haired Holpers laid a nervous hand on See's arm. "He's right, Julie. We can't refuse service or the Control yanks our charter."

"If he misbehaves or performs, we can put him out."

"You have evidence, then, that I am a source of annoyance?"

See stood back, hands behind him. "Call this little talk a warning, Ridolph. You've just had your warning."

Returning to the lobby, Magnus Ridolph ordered his luggage sent to his room, and inquired the whereabouts of the Commonwealth Control officer.

"He's established on the edge of Black Bog, sir; you'll have to take an air-car unless you care for an all-night hike."

"You may order out an air-car," said Magnus Ridolph.

Seated in the well-upholstered tonneau, Ridolph watched Shadow Valley Inn dwindle below. The sun, Pi Sagittarius, which had already set, once more came into view as the car rose to clear Basalt Mountain, then sank in a welter of purples, greens and reds—a phoenix

dying in its many-colored blood. Kokod twilight fell across the planet.

Below passed a wonderfully various landscape: lakes and parks, meadows, cliffs, crags, sweeping hillside slopes, river valleys. Here and there Ridolph sensed shapes in the fading light—the hive-like tumbles. As evening deepened into dove-colored night, the tumbles flickered with dancing orange sparks of illumination.

The air car slanted down, slid under a copse of trees shaped like feather-dusters. Magnus Ridolph alighted, stepped around to the pilot's compartment.

"Who is the Control officer?"

"His name is Clark, sir, Everley Clark."

Magnus Ridolph nodded. "I'll be no more than twenty minutes. Will you wait, please?"

"Yes, sir. Very well, sir."

Magnus Ridolph glanced sharply at the man: a suggestion of insolence behind the formal courtesy? . . . He strode to the frame building. The upper half of the door hung wide; cheerful yellow light poured out into the Kokod night. Within, Magnus Ridolph glimpsed a tall pink man in neat tan gabardines. Something in the man's physiognomy struck a chord of memory; where had he seen this round pink face before? He rapped smartly on the door; the man turned his head and rather glumly arose. Magnus Ridolph saw the man to be he of the mnemiphot presentation on Kokod, the man who had intereviewed the warrior, Sam 192.

Everley Clark came to the door. "Yes? What can I do for you?"

"I had hoped for the privilege of a few words with you," replied Magnus Ridolph.

Clark blew out his cheeks, fumbled with the door fastenings. "By all means," he said hollowly. "Come in, sir." He motioned Magnus Ridolph to a chair. "Won't you sit down? My name is Everley Clark."

"I am Magnus Ridolph."

CLARK evinced no flicker of recognition, responding with only a blank stare of inquiry.

Ridolph continued a trifle frostily. "I assume that our conversation can be considered confidential?"

"Entirely, sir. By all means." Clark showed a degree of animation, went to the fireplace, stood warming his hands at an imaginary blaze.

Ridolph chose his words for their maximum weight. "I have been employed by an important organization which I am not at liberty to name. The members of this organization—who I may say exert a not negligible political influence—feel that Control's management of Kokod business has been grossly inefficient and incorrect."

"Indeed!" Clark's official affability vanished as if a pink spotlight had been turned off.

Magnus Ridolph continued soberly. "In view of these charges, I thought it my duty to confer with you and learn your opinions."

Clark said grimly, "What do you mean—'charges'?"

"First, it is claimed that the gambling operations at Shadow Valley Inn are—if not illegal—explicitly, shamelessly and flagrantly unmoral."

"Well?" said Clark bitterly. "What do you expect me to do? Run out waving a Bible? I can't interfere with tourist morals. They can play merry hell, run around naked, beat their dogs, forge checks—but as long as they leave the natives alone, they're out of my jurisdiction."

Magnus Ridolph nodded sagely. "I see your position clearly. But a second and more serious allegation is that in allowing the Kokod wars to continue day in and day out, Control condones and tacitly encourages a type of brutality which would not be allowed on any other world of the Commonwealth."

Clark seated himself, sighed deeply. "If you'll forgive me for saying so, you sound for all the world like one of the form letters I get every day from wom-

en's clubs, religious institutes and anti-vivisectionist societies." He shook his round pink face with sober emphasis. "Mr. Ridolph, you just don't know the facts. You come up here in a lather of indignation, you shoot off your mouth and sit back with a pleased expression —good deed for the day. Well, it's not right! Do you think I enjoy seeing these little creatures tearing each other apart? Of course not— although I admit I've become used to it. When Kokod was first visited, we tried to stop the wars. The natives considered us damn fools, and went on fighting. We enforced peace, by threatening to cut down the steles. This meant something to them; they gave up the wars. And you never saw a sadder set of creatures in your life. They sat around in the dirt; they contracted a kind of roup and died by the droves. None of them cared enough to drag the corpses away. Four tumbles were wiped out: Cloud Crag, Yellow Bush, Sunset Ridge and Vinegrass. You can see them today, colonies thousands of years old, destroyed in a few months. And all this time the Tumble-matrons were producing young. No one had the spirit to feed them, and they starved or ran whimpering around the planet like naked little rats."

"Ahem," said Magnus Ridolph. "A pity."

"Fred Exman was adjutant here then. On his own authority he ordered the ban removed, told them to fight till they were blue in the face. The wars began half an hour later, and the natives have been happy and healthy ever since."

"If what you say is true," Magnus Ridolph remarked mildly, "I have fallen into the common fault of wishing to impose my personal tenor of living upon creatures constitutionally disposed to another."

Clark said emphatically, "I don't like to see those sadistic bounders at the hotel capitalizing on the wars, but what can I do about it? And the tourists are no better: morbid unhealthy jackals, enjoying the sight of death. . . ."

Magnus Ridolph suggested cautiously; "Then it would be safe to say that, as a private individual, you would not be averse to a cessation of the gambling at Shadow Valley Inn?"

"Not at all," said Everley Clark. "As a private citizen, I've always thought that Julius See, Bruce Holpers and their guests represented mankind at its worst."

"One more detail," said Magnus Ridolph. "I believe you speak and understand the Kokod language?"

"After a fashion—yes." Clark grimaced in apprehension. "You realize I can't compromise Control officially?"

"I understand that very well."

"Just what do you plan then?"

"I'll know better after I witness one or two of these campaigns."

III

SOFT chimes roused Magnus Ridolph; he opened his eyes into the violet gloom of Kokod dawn. "Yes?"

The hotel circuit said, "Five o'clock, Mr. Ridolph. The first party for today's battle leaves in one hour."

"Thank you." Ridolph swung his bony legs over the edge of the air-cushion, sat a reflective moment. He gained his feet, gingerly performed a set of calisthenic exercises.

In the bathroom he rinsed his mouth with tooth-cleanser, rubbed depilatory on his cheeks, splashed his face with cold water, applied tonic to his trim white beard.

Returning to the bedroom, he selected a quiet gray and blue outfit, with a rather dashing cap.

His room opened upon a terrace facing the mountainside; as he strolled forth, the two women whom he had encountered in the charabanc the day previously came past. Magnus Ridolph bowed, but the women passed without even a side glance.

"Cut me dead, by thunder," said Magnus Ridolph to himself. "Well, well." And he adjusted his cap to an even more

rakish angle.

In the lobby a placard announced the event of the day:

IVORY DUNE TUMBLE
vs.
EASTERN SHIELD TUMBLE
at Muscadine Meadow.
All bets must be placed with the attendant.
Odds against Ivory Dune: 8:13
Odds against Eastern Shield: 5:4
In the last hundred battles Ivory Dune has won 41 engagements, Eastern Shield has won 59.
Excursions leave as follows:
For deployment: 6 A.M.
For onslaught: 7 A.M.
For battle proper: 8 A.M.
It is necessary that no interference be performed in the vicinity of the battle. Any guest infringing on this rule will be barred from further wagering. There will be no exceptions.

At a booth nearby, two personable young women were issuing betting vouchers. Magnus Ridolph passed quietly into the restaurant where he breakfasted lightly on fruit juice, rolls and coffee, finishing in ample time to secure a place with the first excursion.

The observation vehicle was of that peculiar variety used in conveying a large number of people across a rough terrain. The car proper was suspended by a pair of cables from a kite-copter which flew five hundred feet overhead. The operator, seated in the nose of the car, worked pitch and attack by remote control, and so could skim quietly five feet over the ground, hover over waterfalls, ridges, ponds, other areas of scenic beauty with neither noise nor the thrash of driven air to disturb the passengers.

Muscadine Meadow was no small distance away; the operator lofted the ship rather abruptly over Basalt Mountain, then slid on a long slant into the northeast. Pi Sagittarius rolled up into the sky like a melon, and the grays, greens, reds, purples of the Kokod countryside shone up from below, rich as Circassian tapestry.

"We are near the Eastern Shield," the attendant announced in a mellifluous baritone. "The tumble is a trifle to the right, beside that bold face of granite whence it derives its name. If you look closely you will observe the Eastern Shield armies already on the march."

BENDING forward studiously, Magnus Ridolph noticed a brown and yellow column winding across the mountainside. To their rear he saw first the tall stele, rising two hundred feet, spraying over at the top into a fountain of pink, black and light green foliage; then below, the conical tumble.

The car sank slowly, drifted over a wooded patch of broken ground, halted ten feet above a smooth green meadow.

"This is the Muscadine," announced the guide. "At the far end you can see Muscadine Tumble and Stele, currently warring against Opal Grotto, odds 9 to 7 both ways . . . If you will observe along the line of bamboo trees you will see the green caps of the Ivory Dune warriors. We can only guess their strategy, but they seem to be preparing a rather intricate offensive pattern—"

A woman's voice said peevishly, "Can't you take the car up higher so we can see everything?"

"Certainly, if you wish, Mrs. Chaim."

Five hundred feet above copter blades slashed the air; the car wafted up like thistledown.

The guide continued, "The Eastern Shield warriors can be seen coming over the hill . . . It seems as if they surmise the Ivory Dune strategy and will attempt to attack the flank . . . There!" His voice rose animatedly. "By the bronze tree! The scouts have made a brush . . . Eastern Shield lures the Ivory Dune scouts into ambush . . . They're gone. Apparently today's code is 4, or possibly 36, allowing all weapons to be used freely, without restriction."

An old man with a nose like a raspberry said, "Put us down, driver. From up here we might as well be back at the inn."

"Certainly, Mr. Pilby."

The car sank low. Mrs. Chaim sniffed and glared.

The meadow rose from below, the car grounded gently on glossy dark green

creepers. The guide said, "Anyone who wishes may go further on foot. For safety's sake, do not approach the battle more closely than three hundred feet; in any event the inn assumes no responsibility of any sort whatever."

"Hurry," said Mr. Pilby sharply. "The onslaught will be over before we're in place."

The guide good-naturedly shook his head. "They're still sparring for position, Mr. Pilby. They'll be dodging and feinting half an hour yet; that's the basis of their strategy—neither side wants to fight until they're assured of the best possible advantage." He opened the door. With Pilby in the lead, several dozen of the spectators stepped down on Muscadine Meadow, among them Magnus Ridolph, Mrs. Chaim and her peacock-shaped friend whom she addressed as "Mrs. Borgage."

"Careful, ladies and gentlemen," called the guide. "Not too close to the battle."

"I've got my money on Eastern Shield," said Mrs. Borgage with heavy archness. "I'm going to make sure there's no funny business."

Magnus Ridolph inspected the scene of battle. "I'm afraid you are doomed to disappointment, Mrs. Borgage. In my opinion, Ivory Dune has selected the stronger position; if they hold on their right flank, give a trifle at the center, and catch the Eastern Shield forces on two sides when they close in, there should be small doubt as to the outcome of today's encounter."

"It must be wonderful to be so penetrating," said Mrs. Borgage in a sarcastic undertone to Mrs. Chaim.

Mr. Pilby said, "I don't think you see the battleground in its entire perspective, sir. The Eastern Shield merely needs to come in around that line of trees to catch the whole rear of the Ivory Dune line—"

"But by so doing," Magnus Ridolph pointed out, "they leave their rear unguarded; clearly Ivory Dune has the advantage of maneuver."

To the rear a second excursion boat landed. The doors opened, there was a hurrying group of people. "Has anything happened yet?" "Who's winning?"

"The situation is fluid," declared Pilby.

"Look, they're closing in!" came the cry. "It's the onslaught!"

Now rose the piping of Kokod war hymns: from Ivory Dune throats the chant sacred and long-beloved at Ivory Dune Tumble, and countering, the traditional paean of the Eastern Shield.

Down the hill came the Eastern Shield warriors, half-bent forward.

A thud and clatter—battle. The shock of small bodies, the dry whisper of knife against lance, the hoarse orders of leg-leaders and squadronites.

Forward and backward, green and black mingled with orange and white. Small bodies were hacked apart, dryly dismembered; small black eyes went dead and dim; a hundred souls raced all together, pell-mell, for the Tumble Beyond the Sky.

Forward and backward moved the standard-bearers—those who carried the sapling from the sacred stele, whose capture would mean defeat for one and victory for the other.

ON THE trip back to the inn, Mrs. Chaim and Mrs. Borgage sat glum and solitary while Mr. Pilby glowered from the window.

Magnus Ridolph said affably to Pilby, "In a sense, an amateur strategist, such as myself, finds these battles a trifle tedious. He needs no more than a glance at the situation, and his training indicates the logical outcome. Naturally none of us are infallible, but given equal forces and equal leadership, we can only assume that the forces in the better position will win."

Pilby lowered his head, chewed the corners of his mustache. Mrs. Chaim and Mrs. Borgage studied the landscape with fascinated absorption.

"Personally," said Ridolph, "I never

gamble. I admire a dynamic attack on destiny, rather than the suppliance and passivity of the typical gambler; nevertheless I feel for you all in your losses, which I hope were not too considerable?"

There was no reply. Magnus Ridolph might have been talking to empty air. After a moment Mrs. Chaim muttered inaudibly to the peacock-shaped Mrs. Borgage, and Mr. Pilby slouched even deeper in his seat. The remainder of the trip was passed in silence.

After a modest dinner of cultivated Bylandia protein, a green salad, and cheese, Magnus Ridolph strolled into the lobby, inspected the morrow's scratch sheet.

The announcement read:

TOMORROW'S FEATURED BATTLE:
VINE HILL TUMBLE
vs.
ROARING CAPE TUMBLE
near Pink Stone Table.
Odds against Vine Hill Tumble: 1:3
Odds against Roaring Cape Tumble: 4:1
All bets must be placed with the attendant.
In the last hundred engagements Vine Hill Tumble has won 77, Roaring Cape has won 23.

Turning away, Magnus Ridolph bumped into Julius See, who was standing, rocking on his heels, his hands behind his back.

"Well, Ridolph, think you'll maybe take a flyer?"

Magnus Ridolph nodded. "A wager on Roaring Cape Tumble might prove profitable."

"That's right."

"On the other hand, Vine Hill is a strong favorite."

"That's what the screamer says."

"What would be your own preference, Mr. See?" asked Magnus Ridolph ingenuously.

"I don't have any preference. I work 23 to 77."

"Ah, you're not a gambling man, then?"

"Not any way you look at it."

Ridolph rubbed his beard and looked reflectively toward the ceiling. "Normally I should say the same of myself. But the wars offer an amateur strategist an unprecedented opportunity to test his abilities, and I may abandon the principles of a lifetime to back my theories."

Julius See turned away. "That's what we're here for."

"Do you impose a limit on the bets?"

See paused, looked over his shoulder. "We usually call a hundred thousand munits our maximum pay-off."

Magnus Ridolph nodded. "Thank you." He crossed the lobby, entered the library. On one wall was a map of the planet, with red discs indicating the location of each tumble.

Magnus Ridolph located Vine Hill and Roaring Cape Tumbles, and found Pink Stone Table, the latter near an arm of Drago Bay. Magnus Ridolph went to a rack, found a large scale physiographic map of the area under his consideration. He took it to a table and spent half an hour in deep concentration.

He rose, replaced the map, sauntered through the lobby and out the side entrance. The pilot who had flown him the previous evening rose to his feet smartly. "Good evening, Mr. Ridolph. Intending another ride?"

"As a matter of fact, I am," Magnus Ridolph admitted. "Are you free?"

"In a moment, as soon as I turn in my day's report."

Ridolph looked thoughtfully after the pilot's hurrying figure. He quietly stepped around to the front entrance. From the vantage of the open door he watched the pilot approach Bruce Holpers and speak hastily.

Holpers ran a lank white hand through his red hair, gave a series of nervous instructions. The pilot nodded sagely, turned away. Magnus Ridolph returned by the route he had come.

He found the pilot waiting beside the ship. "I thought I had better notify Clark that I was coming," said Ridolph breezily, "In case the car broke down, or there were any accident, he would understand the situation and know where to look for me."

The pilot's hands hesitated on the controls. Magnus Ridolph said, "Is there game of any sort on Kokod?"

"No sir, none whatever."

"A pity. I am carrying with me a small target pistol with which I had hoped to bag a trophy or two . . . Perhaps I'll be able to acquire one or two of the native weapons."

"That's quite likely, sir."

"In any case," said Magnus Ridolph cheerily, "you might be mistaken, so I will hold my weapon ready."

The pilot looked straight ahead.

Magnus Ridolph climbed into the back seat. "To the Control office then."

"Yes, Mr. Ridolph."

IV

EVERLEY CLARK greeted his visitor cautiously; when Ridolph sat back in a basket chair, Clark's eyes went everywhere in the room but to those of his guest.

Magnus Ridolph lit an *aromatique*. "Those shields on the wall are native artifacts, I presume?"

"Yes," said Clark quickly. "Each tumble has its distinct colors and insignia."

"To Earthly eyes, the patterns seem fortuitous, but naturally and inevitably Kokod symbology is unique . . . A magnificent display. Does the collection have a price?"

Clark looked doubtfully at the shields. "I'd hate to let them go—although I suppose I could get others. These shields are hard to come by; each requires many thousand hours of work. They make the lacquer by a rather painstaking method, grinding pigment into a vehicle prepared from the boiled-down dead."

Ridolph nodded. "So that's how they dispose of the corpses."

"Yes, it's quite a ritual."

"About those shields—would you take ten thousand munits?"

Clark's face mirrored indecision. Abruptly he lit a cigarette. "Yes, I'd have to take ten thousand munits; I couldn't afford to refuse."

"It would be a shame to deprive you of a possession you obviously value so highly," said Magnus Ridolph. He examined the backs of his hands critically. "If ten thousand munits means so much to you, why do you not gamble at the inn? Surely with your knowledge of Kokod ways, your special information. . . ."

Clark shook his head. "You can't beat that kind of odds. It's a sucker's game, betting at the inn."

"Hmm." Magnus Ridolph frowned. "It might be possible to influence the course of a battle. Tomorrow, for instance, the Vine Hill and Roaring Cape Tumbles engage each other, on Pink Stone Table, and the odds against Roaring Cape seem quite attractive."

Clark shook his head. "You'd lose your shirt betting on Roaring Cape. All their veterans went in the Pyrite campaign."

Magnus Ridolph said thoughtfully, "The Roaring Cape might win, if they received a small measure of assistance."

Clark's pink face expanded in alarm like a trick mask. "I'm an officer of the Commonwealth! I couldn't be party to a thing like that! It's unthinkable!"

Magnus Ridolph said judiciously, "Certainly the proposal is not one to enter upon hastily; it must be carefully considered. In a sense, the Commonwealth might be best served by the ousting of Shadow Valley Inn from the planet, or at least the present management. Financial depletion is as good a weapon as any. If, incidentally, we were to profit, not an eyebrow in the universe could be justifiably raised. Especially since the part that you might play in the achievement would be carefully veiled. . . ."

Clark shoved his hands deep in his pocket, stared a long moment at Magnus Ridolph. "I could not conceivably put myself in the position of siding with one tumble against another. If I did so, what little influence I have on Kokod would go up in smoke."

Magnus Ridolph shook his head indulgently. "I fear you imagine the two of us carrying lances, marching in step with the warriors, fighting in the first ranks. No, no, my friend, I assure you I intend nothing quite so broad."

"Well," snapped Clark, "just what do you intend?"

"It occurred to me that if we set out a few pellets of a sensitive explosive, such as fulminate of mercury, no one could hold us responsible if tomorrow the Vine Hill armies blundered upon them, and were thereby thrown into confusion."

"How would we know where to set out these pellets? I should think—"

Magnus Ridolph made an easy gesture. "I profess an amateur's interest in military strategy; I will assume responsibility for that phase of the plan."

"But I have no fulminate of mercury," cried Clark, "no explosive of any kind!"

"But you do have a laboratory?"

Clark assented reluctantly. "Rather a makeshift affair."

"Your reagents possibly include fuming nitric acid and iodine?"

"Well—yes."

"Then to work. Nothing could suit our purpose better than nitrogen iodide."

THE following afternoon Magnus Ridolph sat in the outdoor café overlooking the vista of Shadow Valley. His right hand clasped an egg-shell goblet of Methedeon wine, his left held a mild cigar. Turning his head, he observed the approach of Julius See and, a few steps behind, like a gaunt red-headed ghost, his partner, Bruce Holpers.

See's face was compressed into layers: a smear of back hair, creased forehead, barred eyebrows, eyes like a single dark slit, pale upper lip, mouth, wide sallow chin. Magnus Ridolph nodded affably. "Good evening gentlemen."

See came to a halt, as two steps later, did Bruce Holpers.

"Perhaps you can tell me the outcome of today's battle?" asked Magnus Ridolph. "I indulged myself in a small wager, breaking the habit of many years, but so far I have not learned whether the gods of chance have favored me."

"Well, well," said See throatily. " 'The gods of chance' you call yourself."

Magnus Ridolph turned him a glance of limpid inquiry. "Mr. See, you appear disturbed; I hope nothing is wrong?"

"Nothing special, Ridolph. We had a middling bad day—but they average out with the good ones."

"Unfortunate . . . I take it, then, that the favorite won? If so, my little wager has been wiped out."

"Your little 25,000 munit wager, eh? And half a dozen other 25,000 munit wagers placed at your suggestion?"

Magnus Ridolph stroked his beard soberly. "I believe I did mention that I thought the odds against Roaring Cape interesting, but now you tell me that Vine Hill has swept the field."

Bruce Holpers uttered a dry cackle. See said harshly, "Come off it, Ridolph. I suppose you're completely unaware that a series of mysterious explosions—" "Land mines," interrupted Holpers, "that's what they were." "—threw Vine Hill enough off stride so that Roaring Cape mopped up Pink Stone Table with them."

Magnus Ridolph sat up.

"Is that right, indeed? Then I have won after all!"

Julius See became suddenly silky, and Bruce Holpers, teetering on heel and toe, glanced skyward. "Unfortunately, Mr. Ridolph, so many persons had placed large bets on Roaring Cape that on meeting the odds, we find ourselves short on cash. We'll have to ask you to take your winnings out in board and room."

"But gentlemen!" protested Magnus Ridolph. "A hundred thousand munits! I'd be here until doomsday!"

See shook his head. "Not at our special Ridolph rates. The next packet is due in five days. Your bill comes to

20,000 munits a day. Exactly 100,000 munits."

"I'm afraid I find your humor a trifle heavy," said Magnus Ridolph frostily.

"It wasn't intended to make you laugh," said See. "Only us. I'm getting quite a kick out of it. How about you, Bruce?"

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Holpers.

Magnus Ridolph rose to his feet. "There remains to me the classical recourse. I shall leave your exorbitant premises."

See permitted a grin to widen his lips. "Where you going to leave to?"

"He's going to Roaring Cape Tumble," snickered Holpers. "They owe him a lot."

"In connection with the hundred thousand munits owed me, I'll take a note, an IOU. Oddly enough, a hundred thousand munits is almost exactly what I lost in the Outer Empire Realty and Investment failure."

See grinned sourly. "Forget it, Ridolph, give it up—an angle that didn't pay off."

Magnus Ridolph bowed, marched away. See and Holpers stood looking after him. Holpers made an adenoidal sound. "Think he'll move out?"

See grunted. "There's no reason why he should. He's not getting the hundred thousand anyway; he'd be smarter sitting tight."

"I hope he does go; he makes me nervous. Another deal like today would wipe us out . . . Six hundred thousand munits—a lot of scratch to go in ten minutes."

"We'll get it back . . . Maybe we can rig a battle or two ourselves."

Holpers's long face dropped, and his teeth showed. "I'm not so sure that's a good idea . . . First thing you know Commonwealth Control would be—"

"Pah!" spat See. "What's Control going to do about it? Clark has all the fire and guts of a Leghorn pullet."

"Yes, but—"

"Just leave it to me."

They returned to the lobby. The desk clerk made an urgent motion. "Mr. Ridolph has just checked out! I don't understand where—"

See cut him off with a brusque motion. "He can camp under a stele for all I care."

MAGNUS RIDOLPH sat back in the most comfortable of Everley Clark's armchairs and lit a cigarette. Clark watched him with an expression at once wary and obstinate. "We have gained a tactical victory," said Magnus Ridolph, "and suffered a strategic defeat."

Everley Clark knit his brows uneasily. "I don't quite follow you. I should think—"

"We have diminished the financial power of Shadow Valley Inn, and hence, done serious damage. But the blow was not decisive and the syndicate is still viable. I was unable to collect my hundred thousand munits, and also have been forced from the scene of maximum engagement. By this token we may fairly consider that our minimum objectives have not been gained."

"Well," said Clark, "I know it hurts to have to admit defeat, but we've done our best and no one can do more. Considering my position, perhaps it's just as well that—"

"If conditions were to be allowed to rest on the present basis," said Magnus Ridolph, "there might be reason for some slight relaxation. But I fear that See and Holpers have been too thoroughly agitated by their losses to let the matter drop."

Everley Clark eyed Magnus Ridolph in perturbation. "But what can they do? Surely I never—"

Magnus Ridolph shook his head gravely. "I must admit that both See and Holpers accused me of setting off the explosions which routed the Vine Hill Tumble. Admission of guilt would have been ingenuous; naturally I maintained that I had done nothing of the sort. I claimed that I had no opportunity to do so, and further, that the Ecologic Examiner aboard the *Hesperornis* who

checked my luggage would swear that I had no chemicals whatsoever among my effects. I believe that I made a convincing protestation."

Everley Clark clenched his fists in alarm, hissed through his teeth.

Magnus Ridolph, looking thoughtfully across the room, went on. "I fear that they will ask themselves the obvious questions, 'Who has Magnus Ridolph most intimately consorted with, since his arrival on Kokod?' 'Who, besides Ridolph, has expressed disapproval of Shadow Valley Inn?' "

Everley Clark rose to his feet, paced back and forth. Ridolph continued in a dispassionate voice. "I fear that they will include these questions and whatever answers come to their minds in the complaint which they are preparing for the Chief Inspector at Methedeon."

Clark slumped into a chair, sat staring glassily at Magnus Ridolph. "Why did I let you talk me into this?" he asked hollowly.

Magnus Ridolph rose to his feet in his turn, paced slowly, tugging at his beard. "Certainly, events have not taken the trend we would have chosen, but strategists, amateur or otherwise, must expect occasional setbacks."

"Setbacks!" bawled Clark. "I'll be ruined! Disgraced! Drummed out of the Control!"

"A good strategist is necessarily flexible," mused Magnus Ridolph. "Beyond question, we now must alter our thinking; our primary objective becomes saving you from disgrace, expulsion, and possible criminal prosecution."

Clark ran his hands across his face. "But—what can we do?"

"Very little, I fear," Magnus Ridolph said frankly. He puffed a moment on his cigarette, shook his head doubtfully. "There is one line of attack which might prove fruitful . . . Yes, I think I see a ray of light."

"How? In what way? You're not planning to confess?"

"No," said Magnus Ridolph. "We gain little, if anything, by that ruse. Our only hope is to discredit Shadow Valley Inn. If we can demonstrate that they do not have the best interests of the Kokod natives at heart, I think we can go a long way toward weakening their allegations."

"That might well be, but—"

"If we could obtain iron-clad proof, for instance, that Holpers and See are callously using their position to wreak physical harm upon the natives, I think you might consider yourself vindicated."

"I suppose so . . . But doesn't the idea seem—well, impractical? See and Holpers have always fallen over backwards to avoid anything of that sort."

"So I would imagine. Er, what is the native term for Shadow Valley Inn?"

"Big Square Tumble, they call it."

"As the idea suggests itself to me, we must arrange that a war is conducted on the premises of Shadow Valley Inn, that Holpers and See are required to take forcible measures against the warriors!"

V

EVERLEY CLARK shook his head. "Devilish hard. You don't quite get the psychology of these tribes. They'll fight till they fall apart to capture the rallying standard of another tumble—that's a sapling from the sacred stele, of course—but they won't be dictated to, or led or otherwise influenced."

"Well, well," said Magnus Ridolph. "In that case, your position is hopeless." He came to a halt before Clark's collection of shields. "Let us talk of pleasanter matters."

Everley Clark gave no sign that he had heard.

Magnus Ridolph stroked one of the shields with reverent fingertips. "Remarkable technique, absolutely unique in my experience. I assume that this rusty orange is one of the ochers?"

Everley Clark made an ambiguous sound.

"A truly beautiful display," said Magnus Ridolph. "I suppose there's no doubt

that—if worse comes to worst in our little business—you will be allowed to decorate your cell at the Regional Penitentiary as you desire."

Everley Clark said in a thick voice, "Do you think they'll go that far?"

Ridolph considered. "I sincerely hope not. I don't see how we can prevent unless—" he held up a finger "—unless—"

"What?" croaked Clark.

"It is farcically simple; I wonder at our own obtuseness."

"What? What? For Heaven's sake, man—"

"I conceive one certain means by which the warriors can be persuaded to fight at Shadow Valley Inn."

Everley Clark's face fell. "Oh. Well, how, then?"

"Shadow Valley Inn or Big Square Tumble, if you like, must challenge the Kokod warriors to a contest of arms."

Everley Clark's expression became more bewildered than ever. "But that's out of the question. Certainly Holpers and See would never. . . ."

Magnus Ridolph rose to his feet. "Come," he said, with decision. "We will act on their behalf."

Clark and Magnus Ridolph walked down Shell Strand. On their right the placid blue-black ocean transformed itself into surf of mingled meringue and whipped-cream; on the left bulked the Hidden Hills. Behind towered the magnificent stele of the Shell Strand Tumble; ahead soared the almost equally impressive stele of the Sea Stone Tumble, toward which they bent their steps. Corps of young warriors drilled along the beach; veterans of a hundred battles who had grown stiff, hard and knobby came down from the forest bearing faggots of lance-stock. At the door to the tumble, infant warriors scampered in the dirt like rats.

Clark said huskily, "I don't like this, I don't like it a bit . . . If it ever gets out—"

"Is such a supposition logically tenable?" asked Magnus Ridolph. "You are the only living man who speaks the Kokod language."

"Suppose there is killing—slaughter?"

"I hardly think it likely."

"It's not impossible. And think of these little warriors—they'll be bearing the brunt—"

Magnus Ridolph said patiently, "We have discussed these points at length."

Clark muttered, "I'll go through with it . . . But God forgive us both if—"

"Come, come," exclaimed Magnus Ridolph. "Let us approach the matter with confidence; apologizing in advance to your deity hardly maximizes our morale . . . Now what is protocol at arranging a war?"

Clark pointed out a dangling wooden plate painted with one of the traditional Kokod patterns. "That's the Charter Board: all I need to do is—well, watch me."

He strode up to the board, took a lance from the hands of a blinking warrior, smartly struck the object. It resonated a dull musical note.

Clark stepped back, and through his nose passed the bag-pipe syllables of the Kokod language.

From the door of the tumble stepped a dozen blank-faced warriors, listening attentively.

Clark wound up his speech, turned, scuffed dirt toward the magnificent Sea Stone stele.

The warriors watched impassively. From within the stele came a torrent of syllables. Clark replied at length, then turned on his heel and rejoined Magnus Ridolph. His forehead was damp. "Well, that's that. It's all set. Tomorrow morning at Big Square Tumble."

"Excellent," said Magnus Ridolph briskly. "Now to Shell Strand Tumble, then Rock River, and next Rainbow Cleft."

Clark groaned. "You'll have the entire planet at odds."

"Exactly," said Magnus Ridolph. "After our visit to Rainbow Cleft, you can drop me off near Shadow Valley Inn, where I have some small business."

Clark darted him a suspicious side-glance. "What kind of business?"

"We must be practical," said Magnus Ridolph. "One of the necessary appurtenances to a party at war on Kokod is a rallying standard, a sacred sapling, a focus of effort for the opposing force. Since we can expect neither Holpers nor See to provide one, I must see to the matter myself."

RIDOLPH strolled up Shadow Valley, approached the hangar where the inn's aircraft were housed. From the shadow of one of the fantastic Kokod trees, he counted six vehicles: three carry-alls, two air-cars like the one which had conveyed him originally to the Control station, and a sleek red sportster evidently the personal property of either See or Holpers.

Neither the hangar-men nor the pilots were in evidence; it might well be their dinner hour. Magnus Ridolph sauntered carelessly forward, whistling an air currently being heard along far-off boulevards.

He cut his whistle off sharply, moved at an accelerated rate. Fastidiously protecting his hands with a bit of rag, he snapped the repair panels from each of the observation cars, made a swift abstraction from each, did likewise for the air-cars. At the sleek sportster he paused, inspected the lines critically.

"An attractive vehicle," he said to himself, "one which might creditably serve the purposes for which I intend it."

He slid back the door, looked inside. The starter key was absent.

Steps sounded behind him. "Hey," said a rough voice, "what are you doing with Mr. See's car?"

Magnus Ridolph withdrew without haste.

"Offhand," he said, "what would you estimate the value of this vehicle?"

The hangarman paused, glowering and suspicious. "Too much not to be taken care of."

Magnus Ridolph nodded. "Thirty thousand munits, possibly."

"Thirty thousand on Earth. This is Kokod."

I'm thinking of offering See a hundred thousand munits."

The hangarman blinked. He5d be crazy not to take it."

"I suppose so," sighed Magnus Ridolph. But first, I wanted to satisfy myself as to the craft's mechanical condition. I fear it has been neglected."

The hangarman snorted in indignation. Not on your life."

Magnus Ridolph frowned. "That tube is certainly spitting. I can tell by the patina along the enamel."

No such thing!" roared the hangarman. "That tube flows like a dream."

Ridolph shook his head. "I can't offer See good money for a defective vehicle. . . He'll be angry to lose the sale."

The hangarman's tone changed. "I tell you that tube's good as gold . . . Wait, I'll show you."

He pulled a key-ring from his pocket, plugged it into the starter socket. The car quivered free of the ground, eager for flight. "See? Just what I told you."

Magnus Ridolph said doubtfully, "It seems to be working fairly well now . . . You get on the telephone and tell Mr. See that I am taking his car for a trial spin, a final check. . . ."

The mechanic looked dumbly at Magnus Ridolph, slowly turned to the speaker on the wall.

Magnus Ridolph jumped into the seat. The mechanic's voice was loud. "The gentleman that's buying your boat is giving it the once-over; don't let him feed you no line about a bum tube; the ship is running like oil down a four mile bore, don't take nothing else . . . What? . . . Sure he's here; he said so himself . . . A little schoolteacher guy with a white beard like a nanny-goat. . . ." The sound from the telephone caused him to jump back sharply. Anxiously he turned to look where he had left Magnus Ridloph and Julius See's sleek red air-car.

Both had disappeared.

MRS. CHAIM roused her peacock-shaped friend Mrs. Borgage rather earlier than usual. "Hurry, Altamira, we've been so late these last few mornings, we've missed the best seats in the observation car."

Mrs. Borgage obliged by hastening her toilet; in short order the two ladies appeared in the lobby. By a peculiar coincidence both wore costumes of dark green, a color which each thought suited the other not at all. They paused by the announcement of the day's war in order to check the odds, then turned into the dining room.

They ate a hurried breakfast, set out for the loading platform. Mrs. Borgage, pausing to catch her breath and enjoy the freshness of the morning, glanced toward the roof of the inn. Mrs. Chaim rather impatiently looked over her shoulder. "Whatever are you staring at, Altamira?"

Mrs. Borgage pointed. "It's that unpleasant little man Ridolph . . . I can't fathom what he's up to . . . He seems to be fixing some sort of branch to the roof."

Mrs. Chaim sniffed. "I thought the management had turned him out."

"Isn't that Mr. See's air-car on the roof behind him?"

"I really couldn't say," replied Mrs. Chaim. "I know very little of such things." She turned away toward the loading platform, and Mrs. Borgage followed.

Once more they met interruption; this time in the form of the pilot. His clothes were disarranged; his face had suffered scratching and contusion. Running wild-eyed, he careened into the two green-clad ladies, disengaged himself and continued without apology.

Mrs. Chaim bridled in outrage. "Well, I never!" She turned to look after the pilot. "Has the man gone mad?"

Mrs. Borgage, peering ahead to learn the source of the pilot's alarm, uttered a sharp cry.

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Chaim irritatedly.

Mrs. Borgage clasped her arm with bony fingers. "Look. . . ."

VI

DURING the subsequent official investigation, Commonwealth Control Agent Everley Clark transcribed the following eye-witness acount:

"I am Joe 234, Leg-leader of the Fifteenth Brigade, the Fanatics, in the service of the indomitable Shell Strand Tumble.

"We are accustomed to the ruses of Topaz Tumble and the desperate subtleties of Star Throne; hence the ambush prepared by the giant warriors of Big Square Tumble took us not at all by surprise.

"Approaching by Primary Formation 17, we circled the flat space occupied by several flying contrivances, where we flushed out a patrol spy. We thrashed him with our lances, and he fled back toward his own forces.

"Continuing, we encountered a first line of defense consisting of two rather ineffectual warriors accoutred in garments of green cloth. These we beat also, according to Convention 22, in force during the day. Uttering terrible cries, the two warriors retreated, luring us toward prepared positions inside the tumble itself. High on the roof the standard of Big Square Tumble rose, plain to see. No deception there, at least! Our strategic problem assumed a clear form: how best to beat down resistance and win to the roof.

"Frontal assault was decided upon; the signal to advance was given. We of the Fifteenth were first past the outer defense—a double panel of thick glass which we broke with rocks. Inside we met a spirited defense which momentarily threw us back.

"At this juncture occurred a diversion in the form of troops from the Rock River Tumble, which, as we now know, the warriors of the Big Square Tumble had rashly challenged for the same day. The Rock River warrriors

entered by a row of flimsy doors facing the mountain, and at this time the Big Square defenders violated Convention 22, which requires that the enemy be subdued by blows of the lance. Flagrantly they hurled glass cups and goblets, and by immemorial usage we were allowed to retaliate in kind.

"At the failure of this tactic, the defending warriors withdrew to an inner bastion, voicing their war-cries.

"The siege began in earnest; and now the Big Square warriors began to pay the price of their arrogance. Not only had they pitted themselves against Shell Strand and Rock River, but they likewise had challenged the redoubtable Rainbow Cleft and Sea Stone, conquerors of Rose Slope and Dark Fissure. The Sea Stone warriors, led by their Throw-away Legion, poured through a secret rear-entrance, while the Rainbow Cleft Special Vanguard occupied the Big Square main council hall.

"A terrible battle raged for several minutes in a room designed for the preparation of nourishments, and again the Big Square warriors broke code by throwing fluids, pastes, and powders—a remission which the alert Shell Strand warriors swiftly copied.

"I led the Fanatic Fifteenth outside, hoping to gain exterior access to the roof, and thereby win to the Big Square standard. The armies of Shell Strand, Sea Stone, Rock River and Rainbow Cleft now completely surrounded Big Square Tumble, a magnificent sight which shall live in my memory till at last I lay down my lance.

"In spite of our efforts, the honor of gaining the enemy standard went to a daredevil squad from Sea Stone, which scaled a tree to the roof and so bore away the trophy. The defenders, ignorant of, or ignoring the fact that the standard had been taken, broke the code yet again, this time by using tremendous blasts of water. The next time Shell Strand wars with Big Square Tumble we shall insist on one of the Conventions allowing any and all weapons; otherwise we place ourselves at a disadvantage.

"Victorious, our army, together with the troops of Sea Stone, Rock River and Rainbow Cleft, assembled in the proper formations and marched off to our home tumbles. Even as we departed, the great Black Comet Tumble dropped from the sky to vomit further warriors for Big Square. However there was not pursuit, and unmolested we returned to the victory rituals."

CAPTAIN BUSSEY of the Phoenix Line packet *Archaeornix*, which had arrived as the Kokod warriors marched away, surveyed the wreckage with utter astonishment. "What in God's name happened to you?"

Julius See stood panting, his forehead clammy with sweat. "Get me guns," he cried hoarsely. "Get me a blaster, I'll wipe out every damn hive on the planet. . . ."

Holpers came loping up, arms flapping the air. "They've completely demolished us, you should see the lobby, the kitchen, the day rooms! A shambles—"

Captain Bussey shook his head in bewilderment. "Why in the world should they attack you? They're supposed to be a peaceable race . . . Except toward each other, of course."

"Well, something got into them," said See, still breathing hard. "They came at us like tigers—beating us with their damn little sticks . . . I finally washed them out with fire-hoses."

"What about your guests?" asked Captain Bussey in sudden curiosity.

See shrugged. "I don't know what happened to them. A bunch ran off up the valley, smack into another army. I understand they got beat up as good as those that stayed."

"We couldn't even escape in our aircraft," complained Holpers. "Not one of them would start. . . ."

A mild voice interrupted. "Mr. See, I have decided against purchasing your air-car, and have returned it to the hangar."

See slowly turned, the baleful aura of

his thoughts almost tangible. "You, Ridolph . . . I'm beginning to see daylight. . . ."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Come on, spill it!" See took a threatening step forward. Captain Bussey said, "Careful, See, watch your temper." See ignored him. "What's your part in all this, Ridolph?"

Magnus Ridolph shook his head in bewilderment. "I'm completely at a loss. I rather imagine that the natives learned of your gambling on events they considered important, and decided to take punitive steps."

THE ornamental charabanc from the ship rolled up; among the passengers was a woman of notable bust, correctly tinted, massaged, coiffed, scented and decorated. "Ah!" said Magnus Ridolph. "Mrs. Chickering! Charming!"

"I could stay away no longer," said Mrs. Chickering. "I had to know how—our business was proceeding."

Julius See leaned forward curiously. "What kind of business do you mean?"

Mrs. Chickering turned him a swift contemptuous glance; then her attention was attracted by two women who came hobbling from the direction of the inn. She gasped, "Olga! Altamira! What on Earth—"

"Don't stand there gasping," snapped Mrs. Chaim. "Get us clothes. Those frightful savages tore us to shreds."

Mrs. Chickering turned in confusion to Magnus Ridolph. "Just what has happened? Surely you can't have—"

Magnus Ridolph cleared his throat. "Mrs. Chickering, a word with you aside." He drew her out of earshot of the others. "Mrs. Chaim and Mrs. Borgage—they are friends of yours?"

Mrs. Chickering cast an anxious glance over her shoulder. "I can't understand the situation at all," she muttered feverishly. "Mrs. Chaim is the president of the Woman's League and Mrs. Borgage is treasurer . . . I can't understand them running around with their clothing in shreds. . . ."

Magnus Ridolph said candidly, "Well, Mrs. Chickering, in carrying out your instructions, I allowed scope to the natural combativeness of the natives, and perhaps they—"

"Martha," came Mrs. Chaim's grating voice close at hand, "What is your connection with this man? I have reason to suspect that he is mixed up in this terrible attack . . . look at him!" Her voice rose furiously. "They haven't laid a finger on him! And the rest of us—"

Martha Chickering licked her lips. "Well, Olga dear, this is Magnus Ridolph. In accordance with last month's resolution, we hired him to close down the gambling here at the inn."

Magnus Ridolph said in his suavest tones, "Following which, Mrs. Chaim and Mrs. Borgage naturally thought it best to come out and study the situation at first hand; am I right?"

Mrs. Chaim and Mrs. Borgage glared. Mrs. Chaim said, "If you think, Martha Chickering, that the Woman's League will in any way recognize this rogue—"

"My dear Mrs. Chaim," protested Magnus Ridolph.

"But, Olga—I promised him a thousand munits a week!"

Magnus Ridolph waved his hand airily. "My dear Mrs. Chickering, I prefer that any sums due me be distributed among worthy charities. I have profited during my short stay here—"

"*See!*" came Captain Bussey's voice. "For God's sake, man, control yourself!"

Magnus Ridolph, turning, found See struggling in the grasp of Captain Bussey. "Try and collect!" See cried out to Magnus Ridolph. He angrily thrust Captain Bussey's arms aside, stood with hands clenching and unclenching. "Just try and collect!"

"My dear Mr. See, I have already collected."

"You've done nothing of the sort—and if I catch you in my boat again, I'll break your scrawny little neck!"

Magnus Ridolph held up his hand. "The hundred thousand munits I wrote off immediately; however there were six

other bets which I placed by proxy; these were paid, and my share of the winnings came to well over three hundred thousand munits. Actually, I regard this sum as return of the capital which I placed with the Outer Empire Investment and Realty Society, plus a reasonable profit. Everything considered, it was a remunerative as well as instructive investment."

"Ridolph," muttered See, "one of these days—"

Mrs. Chaim shouldered forward. "Did I hear you say 'Outer Empire Realty and Investment Society'?"

Magnus Ridolph nodded. "I believe that Mr. See and Mr. Holpers were responsible officials of the concern."

Mrs. Chaim took two steps forward. See frowned uneasily; Bruce Holpers began to edge away. "Come back here!" cried Mrs. Chaim. "I have a few words to say before I have you arrested."

Magnus Ridolph turned to Captain Bussey. "You return to Methedeon on schedule, I assume?"

"Yes," said Captain Bussey dryly.

Magnus Ridolph nodded. "I think I will go aboard at once, since there will be considerable demand for passage."

"As you wish," said Captain Bussey.

"I believe No. 12 is your best cabin?"

"I believe so," said Captain Bussey.

"Then kindly regard Cabin No. 12 as booked."

"Very well, Mr. Ridolph."

Magnus Ridolph looked up the mountainside. "I noticed Mr. Pilby running along the ridge a few minutes ago. I think it would be a real kindness if he were notified that the war is over."

"I think so too," said Captain Bussey. They looked around the group. Mrs. Chaim was still engaged with Julius See and Bruce Holpers. Mrs. Borgage was displaying her bruises to Mrs. Chickering. No one seemed disposed to act on Magnus Ridolph's suggestion.

Magnus Ridolph shrugged, climbed the gangway into the *Archaeornyx*. "Well, no matter. In due course he will very likely come by himself." ● ● ●

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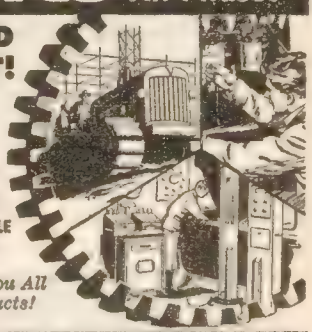

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"But what will it prove, Gil?"

FOOL'S ERRAND

By PAUL LAWRENCE PAYNE

They argued all the way to Mars . . . and there, each found his proof!

THERE'S an interesting sidelight on the First Martian Expedition which, so far as I know, hasn't come out. I didn't expect it ever would, because in a way it has no bearing on Hop One. It

was just a bit of byplay among a few of the ship's company, so to speak.

Of course, it might have come out when we wrapped up the Return Leg and laid the sizzling *Einstein* to rest in a cloud of North Atlantic steam. The minute they cracked us out of there, the pressure for copy was on. They got the meat off the bone fast and then they went after the crumbs. Everything about us was simply too utterly too too. When it got to the point of comparing the way each of us sneezed and a detailed history of our parent's ingrown toenails, we revolted as nicely as we could and each of us went off in a different direction to some quiet place where we could write our books in peace.

And yet, as I say, this business between Father Molloy and Emmy Moore never came out. I have no right, I suppose, even now that Moore's dead, to be spreading it around. But it's a harmless enough little story. Father Molloy—wherever he is—certainly can't mind, and Moore's left no one behind to take offense that I know of.

Father Gilbert Molloy was not taken on as a priest. Nobody figured on a chaplain as part of the payload. Nobody even asked for one. If the question had come up, I don't doubt the answer would have been, "Hell, we're leaving our souls behind!" Or, maybe, "Since when is there absolution for suicides?"

You see, religion didn't enter into our calculations. Leastways, I assume most of the others felt the way I did when they asked me if I wanted to die young and out in deep space. There was no question that we all felt it would be a most exciting and wonderful death. Being my own peculiar and emancipated kind of Jew (Reformed), I by-passed my rabbi and took it up with Jehovah direct. I earmarked whatever I had in the way of a soul and left it with Him.

And I don't doubt the rest made similar dispositions, in their own private and special ways—with the exception of Lieutenant Emmett Moore, who had no prayers to say, nor any peace to make, before or after. (Most of the crew were Catholics or Protestants; Doc Kaplan, the only other Jew, looked Orthodox to me, but he never said.) Whatever was to be done had to be done before we were all buttoned up for initial blast.

There were simply too many unknown factors—acceleration, cosmic radiation, meteors, course, orbit, landing, hostile organisms, impossible ground conditions, take-off, return flight, landing, insanity . . . what the hell, if a man has to hurl himself headlong into a dark hole, what can he do but cross himself first or whatever? There's no time for prayers after he's hurled himself.

NO, GIL shipped out as *Molloy, G: Geologist.* You'll find it that way on the ship's articles down in the Smithsonian. And for a long way out into that cold dark nothing he never said a mumblin' word about being ordained for anything but chipping rock off the next planet out from the sun. Seeing him jettison his oatmeal along with the rest of us when we came out of 5G shock and found our tummies gone weightless, I figured him for sure enough just another of our crew of tough, quiet specialists.

He was with us on the oxygen jags, howling naughty words and flipping from stanchion to handhold and back. His first anxiety seemed to be for his equipment, just like the rest of us—his diamond band-saw with which to slice up the Martian rocks and his precious jars of acids and reagents and the field kit and the compact petrographic microscope. He was the dry, wiry type that looks older than it is; all his reserve had a professorial, scholarly cast about it. Not a one of us suspected that he had his mental collar turned around.

It would have to be Emmett Moore who found him praying. As the *Einstein's* exec it was his business, of course, to find and pry into and examine anything and everything inside that pencil with which we were making the first entry in the ledger of interplanetary

travel. Anybody else, finding a man like that, would excuse himself and pass on. But not Emmy. He was an atheist—and proud of it.

Interesting job, trying to pray on a space-ship. God knows, the setting was more than favorable—it was magnificent. One had only to drift away from the rest, until their voices became murmurs reverberating down that long tunnel over the hum and clack of the blowers and generators, cling to a port-hole—and there you were, face to face with God, if that was your fancy. I imagine several of us had private moments of communion, our throats choked with exaltation or our hearts congealed with terror.

But Gil had tried for the position of kneeling, and that's something else again. We had a little centripetal gravity, a very little—an almost imperceptible tendency to drift to the axial shaft; one occasionally found oneself in coy contact with it, without so much as a bump. In the privacy of a food locker, about five million miles out, Gil had tried for the traditional posture of humility by touching his knees to the locker's inner wall—toward the shaft. But the pull was evidently insufficient and the thrust of his breathing or the stroke of his heart was enough to float him free.

Any of the rest of us would have found the thing so silly as to destroy the mood, but Gil's fervor carried him through. And that's how Emmy found him, the way I heard it—just hanging in the air with his legs drawn up and his fingers clasped. Emmy asked Gil if he was sick or hurt. Gil twisted his head and explained with what was probably admirable dignity under the circumstances.

"Praying!" I can just imagine Emmy's short mirthless laugh. "For the love of God."

"That's exactly it," said Gil, unable to resist so perfect an opening. "For the love of God."

And that started it. Emmy couldn't let it go. His tone was almost big-brotherly as he asked Gil if he'd said his prayers since last change of watch. And if he caught Gil opening a concentrate-tin for a bite to eat, he'd ask Gil if he hadn't forgotten something.

I THINK Captain Perrignaud spoke to Emmy. After all, the crew's morale was as precious and dangerous as the pile it was my function to mother, back there in the reaction chamber. That morale had risen to a high pitch when we all had climbed out of our slings and realized we were still alive and truly headed for Mars. But there were tight moments ahead, when the word "unity" would be as important as the words "half-life" or "critical mass."

Or maybe some of us straightened Emmy out in other ways. I'm afraid he'd assumed from the very first day of training that we were all non-believers, simply because we were scientists and technicians. He'd rather expected us all to join in the laughter and fun. I was present during more than one uncomfortable silence and I guess, in one way or another, it penetrated to Emmy Moore.

He laid off, as if the subject wearied him. It seemed, however, that he was still chewing on it. You see, while there weren't exactly any cliques developing among us, I took a liking to both Gil and Emmy. I responded to the sardonic twinkle in Emmy's eyes and I liked Gil's wrung-dry humor. And I think they would have taken to each other more, if only Emmy had put away his needle.

If it hadn't been for me, it might have remained a mere difference of opinion. But I was the unconscious catalyst, simply because I brought them together. I would be with one and the other would come drifting by, stop and exchange a cheery word. There was no stiffness between them and they could kid around with each other. But I think that, without me, they wouldn't exactly have sought each other out, realizing after all that there was that difference

of opinion, and it was a barrier.

For a while the subject lay silent between them, and Emmy wouldn't touch it. He was like a dog, warned to ignore the cat. I could read the pressure in his eyes.

I'm sure Gil never meant to scratch Emmy's itch, but sometimes things just happen. Gil and I were alone when it started, having a coffee-tube apiece in the galley. The nose watch—I think it was Adams—sang out over the intercom: "Meteor occulting sun." We both snatched down our polaroid visors and shoved off to the galley port-hole. It was a rare and wonderful sight, and I think Haycroft has described it best in his book:

"The body itself could not be seen, except as a sort of hole moving across a swarm of glittering lights. The stars in its path appeared to drop into it and then pop out again. When the blazing pin-head of the sun fell in, our breaths caught in atavistic terror—and then were let out in gasps of relief as the primary swam forth again in all its glory."

WE DRIFTED away from the port-hole and were silent for a moment. Then Gil said softly, "I thought I was a religious man until I hit deep space." I started to reply, but another voice cut in.

"What! Don't tell me you've come to your senses!"

Emmy had just come up (it's pretty hard to make a noise when you're floating instead of walking). He reached into the refrigerator and took a coffee-tube from the rack. He dropped it into the heat coil and twisted to smile at Gil.

"Getting a little perspective out here, hey? Beginning to see the folly of an earthbound god" (I know Emmy would spell it with a little "g") "and a heaven seventeen miles up?"

Gil smiled back at him just as sweetly. "I trust my theology isn't as crude as that."

"All theology is crude, though, don't you think?" Emmy's smile grew mocking, and a little taut.

"Oh, I don't know," said Gil. "Although, in a way, yes. That's just what I was going to say to Jack when you came along. Theology is just man's view of God and it's a dim vision at best. I've just had a most effective reminder of how dim."

Emmy sniffed and lifted out the coffee-tube. I cleared my throat, for what it was worth.

"You mean," said Emmy, "that you're all amazed at the scope of the sheerly physical world—or the universe. You're amazed, you're mystified, you're emotionally charged to capacity, at mere mass and distance and relative factors like that. You can't say to yourself, 'I see a thing moving among some other things and so what'?"

"You mean I'm supposed to look out that port-hole and say, 'Meaningless—it's all meaningless'?" Gil shook his head. "That I can't do. Can you?" He squinted at Emmy and spoke with child-like earnestness.

Emmy pulled the tube out of his mouth. "Let's have none of your jesuitical sophistry, friend. Of course, it's not meaningless. I'm awed by it all—and my vision of the purely natural laws operating behind it is as dim as you say your theology is. But everytime I'm awed, or fail to understand, I'm not going to whisper to myself, 'Then it must be god'. I'm going to fight that."

Gil laughed and said, "Why?"

I could see that the laugh had stung Emmy.

He deliberately sucked his tube dry, crumpled it and shoved it into the disposal chute. "In the name of progress, Molloy. Man's pulling himself up out of the swamp, out of the jungle. He owes it to himself to keep a clear head."

"And God gets no credit. Man is making this long uphill climb without guidance, without light—without a goal, you might say?" Gil's grinning lips were slightly pursed; he seemed to be enjoying himself.

"God, god, god!" Emmy's voice rose in spite of himself. "Be sure to bring that in whenever you can. Confusion promotes theology, heightens the mystery, increases the necessity of blind faith—blind, unreasoning—"

I slid my two cents in as smoothly as I could. "We will now discuss the coefficient of linear expansion. The class will please come to order."

They both laughed then, and Gil poked his head out into the passage to see if anybody was near. They managed to keep their senses of humor, because they both realized how bad it could get, if they didn't watch it.

They kept it up as good-natured banter. "You have a real feeling for it, Gil," said Emmy. "You have the right glib touch. You ought to study for the priesthood."

"I have," said Gil.

"I'm not surprised," said Emmy. "What happened? Did you flunk out? Was your theology too dim?"

"No, I made it."

My jaw dropped as far as Emmy's. "Really? You're a priest?"

"You mean we should call you Father?" Emmy laughed. "Father Molloy! I should have known the Pope would get one of his boys aboard."

Gil raised his eyebrows. "Pope? I don't acknowledge the Pope. You've got me confused with the Roman Catholics. I'm an Anglican, dear boy. The *Holy* Catholic Church."

"Tst, tst, tst!" Emmy shook his head. "How am I *ever* going to keep them all straight?"

"It does take a bit of intellect," said Gil mildly.

Emmy cocked a ferocious eye at him and, for a minute, I wasn't sure he wasn't mad. Something happened to break it up, so I never heard Emmy's *riposte* to that one.

NOT being a zealot myself, I suppose I was a little slow to realize that somebody'd blow a fuse sooner or later. I have just never wanted to convert anybody to my views and so I couldn't imagine that all this would have to come to a head. Not that I suppose I could have done anything about it.

Somehow, somewhere aboard that hollow-echoing cylinder—with Mars a dirty yellow bead just off the nose—Gil and Emmy had themselves a knock-down drag-out, with nobody like me around to spoil the fun. They clammed up in good shape afterwards and acted normal—as normal as any of us were acting, with Death Number Two rolling toward the calculated rendezvous—and so I only got it piecemeal from the two of them, after the Landing.

What started it was that tiresome old speculation about life on Mars. Neither of them thought it likely, in the light of existing theoretical knowledge, but were in a mood to kick it around purely as a fantasy—you know, whether the Martians jammed their subways at the rush hour and all that sort of thing.

Emmy couldn't resist a new and rather obvious angle, and began dreaming up for Gil's benefit the Martian sabbath—dressing up in their best harnesses and manicuring their claws and scolding their children for trying to eat each other and all crawling off to a wild, spirally cathedral to sit and listen to a mad, squealy organ and then stand up and hiss out a hymn. Knowing Emmy, I'm sure it was very funny and, knowing Gil, I could see how it would become less and less amusing and more and more irritating.

Anyway, Gil at last went out on a limb. He stated solemnly that, if we found life, we would find God. Just as the early missionaries found witch doctors and totem poles and ritual dances on Earth, so we would find that the Prime Mover had made Himself known on Mars—no matter what the Martians' stage of development. There would be a symbol that even the smug conceit of Emmett Moore would not be able to dismiss.

Emmy, enjoying all this hugely—he had not too often got the better of Gil

—rode it right out to the finish ("But what will it *prove*, Gil?"—"Tell me, Father Molloy, will you dress them in mother hubbards?") until poor, white-faced Gil literally had to pull himself away—by the nearest, undignified stanchion.

I don't doubt he floated as fast as he could to the other end of the ship and there had himself a fast prayer for strength.

Well, as you know, within a week after the Landing we were resigned to the absence of any recognizable life on that chilly ball. Yet we realized that a far more intensive survey than we had been able to make would have to be awaited for the final answer to that question. We had only so much time and so much supplies.

So we kept the possibility in the back of our heads that maybe, deep in those great gorges (Gil's first contention has since been proved—that they are fissures, from the original cooling faults) where the nitrogen and oxygen was a trifle denser, or buried in some undetected caverns, there lurked some sort of sentient organism. I think most of us hoped so, if only for the excitement of it.

We all had a chance to tease that hope along. Those of us who did not have specific exploratory assignments, like Gil, were split up into thorough ground-search details in the vicinity of the ship. As you may have read, we covered over a hundred and fifty square miles, including some fifteen miles of the nearest gorge, and I like to think we personally turned over every grain of that damned desert.

One day I broke out all over with the peculiar dehydration rash, as Doc Kaplan called it, and Perrignaud, who was running the search party in that quadrant, sent me back to the ship. Once aboard, the treatment was simple and Kaplan turned me loose with instructions not to leave the ship.

I went down to the reaction chamber for a random check of the pile, lattice, isotope rods, etc. Then I started for the nose, planning on killing a few minutes on the view—although Mars as a spectacle was beginning to pall—all that dull sand with ripples of low black hills running through it. We hadn't landed near any of the green areas.

ON MY way up the axial stairs I heard motor-whine from the machine shop and stepped off on that landing just out of idle curiosity. I found Emmy Moore in the shop and he was turning off Gil's band-saw as I entered.

"Hi." He grinned and held up the thing he was working on. "Pretty?"

I frowned at it. It was a cross.

"Indigenous granite," he explained. "I found it yesterday among those low hills in Number Four quadrant. It was a cinch to shape it with this thing. Now what I want to do is rough it up."

I lifted my frown toward him. "What the hell, Moore? I never knew you lusted to work in stone."

He laughed. "My first, and last, sculpture. I'll have to make it perfect."

I hefted it. It was one solid piece of stone, the upright about six inches long and the cross-bar about four. "I would have thought a nude would be more along your line. Why this?"

"I'm planning a little kick in the pants for Mister Holy Orders Molloy." He took the thing and began clamping it in a vise. I sat down and watched him start chipping with chisel and hammer along the straight edge left by the saw. "I'm going to rough this up until it looks like a bit of primitive handicraft. Then I'm going to treat it with some of Gil's acids, wet it and let it dry in front of a blower for a fast coat of oxidation. When I get through it should look like an authentic native artifact." He grinned mischievously at me. "I gave Gil's mineralogy textbooks a quick riffle this morning and learned all about weathering rocks."

"You're wonderful," I murmured. "Tell me, just how is this going to jolt our friend, the little padre?"

"He's going to find it—" Emmy

stopped and straightened up to look at me. "You could do it."

"Do what?"

"Listen." He put a hip on the bench and waved the chisel at me. "You know where Gil is working, collecting his samples. He'll be over in your quadrant tomorrow. Just sneak this out in your tunic and lay it in some inconspicuous-conspicuous place, if you know what I mean. Scuff a little sand over it, as if it's been half-buried for centuries—"

He stopped, because by then I was shaking my head slowly.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Gil couldn't possibly connect you with it."

"That's not the point," I said slowly. "I think you have *me* pegged a little wrong, pal. I think you think that, because I've been amused at some of the sparring between you and Gil, I have no feelings of my own in the matter. And maybe you think, because I'm a Jew—no anti-Semitism on your part—that this particular little symbol—" I hefted the cross again—"means nothing to me—"

"For Christ's sake," burst out Emmy, "this is only a gag!"

"And, for Christ's sake," I said, lingering over the words, "I won't go along with it. I don't know what you're going to do or say when—and if—Gil comes busting back here with this, but I don't see any laughs in it—at all."

All he could do was stare at me, half-incredulous, half-smiling. "Well, I'll be damned."

That was a sucker's opening and I let it pass. I got up to go. "After all," I added, "could you get Gil to cut the Star of David on the face of some boulder, just for the gag?"

Emmy removed all expression from his face. "Okay," he said, turning back to the bench, "sorry I said anything."

His voice caught me at the door. "You going to tip my mitt to the little minister?"

I laughed. "No, *sir*. You go right ahead with your little joke. And it is a *little* joke, isn't it?"

I DON'T know when he put it out, but very probably he slipped out—against the Captain's orders, of course—during his turn off watch in the middle of the night. In that low gravity, he could have bounded away to the hills and back in a couple of hours. It brings a kind of odd vision to the mind—of a lone figure leaping over the sands, with either one shadow or two (depending on whether both moons were up) describing scallops alongside . . . a modern man in a bubble helmet, bearing a little stone cross . . . I find it quite ironic.

But put it out he did, for Gil brought it back. He didn't say anything when he reported in late the next afternoon and I wondered if Emmy had given up his idea. I should have known better, because Emmy had put in a deal of work and he was the dogged type.

Every night at about 2200 I made my last check of the isotope pile and batted out a report in duplicate, the copy to be left in the engineer's cubicle for the dog watch to refer to against the dials, and the original for the exec to enter into the log and file up in Master Control. Emmy would drop by on his last round of the ship before going on watch and pick it up, stopping to beat the gums with me.

It was the one time when Gil could count on finding us together. He came in and leaned against the control panel, yawning and listening to some little reminiscence or other I was indulging in. When I wound it up, Emmy turned to Gil and said, "Well, what luck today with the rocks and stones?"

Gil shrugged. "Nothing new. I'd say I've got the story on the crust up there in my chest. The next expedition will have to do the boring and blasting." He paused and looked from one to the other of us. He went on gravely, "I did find something else rather interesting."

Emmy raised his eyebrows, blinking innocently. I knew, then, and couldn't resist feeding Gil his cue. "What?"

Gil turned to Emmy. "You remember the little discussion we had about finding

evidence of God on Mars?"

Emmy nodded, his tongue starting to slide into his cheek.

Gil smiled his sweetest smile. "I found it, Emmy. I found God." He started to undo a button on his blouse.

I began to feel suddenly uncomfortable; I had to drop my eyes from those so-earnest ones of Gilbert Molloy. But Emmy only sucked in his cheeks and said, "Did you, now?"

The little stone cross clattered on the counter in front of me, spreading a few grains of sand around.

"I found that," Gil's calm voice continued, "about ten miles from here. It was at the foot of a basalt cliff, half-buried. Very interesting, don't you think, Moore?"

"Well, I'll be dog-goned!" Emmy was hamming it up for all he was worth. "What do you know about that?"

"What do I know about it?" A change came into Gil's voice; it grew sharp. "Only what I can guess, Moore—guessing on what facts I know. I must say, I feel sorry for a man who'd go to all this trouble."

"Trouble?" echoed Emmy, caught off guard. We both stared up at Gil. His eyes, on Emmy, were a couple of hot bright marbles.

"Yes. It was a hard job, but you did it well." He dug something out of his breast pocket and dropped it by the cross. It was a short steel brad.

"It was incredible that I should also find that. I might almost call it a miracle. A nail by the cross—think of it!" Gil's voice was soft, even in the silence of the cubicle. "I'm a man of faith, Moore—and I have the greatest faith that you will find that little nail missing from one of the caulks on your boots."

Emmy defiantly locked his stare with Gil's until he had worked one foot out from under the counter and cocked it on his knee. I couldn't see, but evidently it wasn't that boot. Gil's stare did not waver and Emmy brought up the other foot, twisting it so he could see as well as Gil.

He put it down slowly. He said, thinly, "So I lost a nail."

Gil reached over and tapped a corner of the cross. "I also chipped off a little for examination. Why you thought you could fool a geologist, I can't imagine. The oxidation doesn't begin to match that of the genuinely weathered samples I've been picking up. As an example of primitive Martian art, I'm afraid it doesn't quite stack up."

Emmy sat back, his mouth in a sour twist. "Well, Molloy, it would appear you didn't find your god, after all."

"Oh, I found God," said Gil quickly. "Although I can't expect you to see it. You see, Emmy—" and his voice grew a shade more kindly—"you threw me off base. You had me *looking* for God, all the time I've been out there supposedly doing my job. One mustn't *look* for Him. That only means doubt, and confusion. He showed me that—today."

Emmy tried to include me with his grin. "This'll be good." But I contented myself with calmly sweeping the sand off the counter.

"Yes," Gil went on easily, "He had you slave over that cross—" he chuckled —"by way of penance, Moore. And then He worked the nail out of your boot. What's more, He saw to it that I saw it—"

Emmy burst out into a short, contemptuous laugh. He placed both hands on the counter and got up. "Sorry, Molloy, to break up the flow of crap, but I gotta go."

Gil stood aside. "That's all right," he said gravely. "I just want to give you one thought to take with you."

Emmy turned in the doorway and smiled with a kind of weary condescension. "What is it, little man?"

"Please stay the hell away from my tools and equipment," Gil said evenly. "I've got my work to do."

I threw the cross out of a port-hole. Neither of them asked what had become of it, nor did they speak to each other again ● ● ●

A Novelet by

KENDELL FOSTER CROSSEN

The Polluxian Pretender

When Manning Draco took a little run up to Pollux to spring a client, his business trip zoomed into an emotional trip-up

I

IT WAS approximately four o'clock, Terra Standard Time, of a mid-winter afternoon in the year 3472 in Nyork. High above the city it was snowing, but the whirling flakes never got beyond the heat-belt which was being broadcast from the spires of the tallest buildings. Inside a tastefully decorated apartment, Manning Draco fussed over the arrangements he'd made. For the tenth time, he checked the menu he'd punched on the Dinners-At-Home tape. He once more made sure that the wall vents had removed every speck of dust from the apartment. He glanced in the mirror to see if he needed to use the

ALEX
SCHOMBURG

Glo-Shav again. He might get by.

The visiphone buzzed angrily. For the past two hours it had been signaling methodically every ten minutes. Manning continued to ignore it.

He straightened a picture on the wall and glanced for the fiftieth time at his chronograph. Never had time gone so slowly.

As anyone might have guessed, Manning Draco was expecting a dinner guest. She was Lhana Xano, the Martian receptionist at the Greater Solarian Insurance Company, Monoplated, where Manning was the star investigator. It was now all of seven months since Lhana Xano had begun to work for the insurance company, and Manning had carried on a tireless campaign of seduction. For seven months it had been fruitless, but she had finally agreed to have dinner at his apartment. She was due to arrive at five-thirty, coming directly from work.

With the insight common to all employees, Manning had known from the beginning that the persistent visiphone calls were from J. Barnaby Cruikshank, the president of Greater Solarian. Once he had switched on one of the message tapes, turning it off again at the first blast of profanity.

At a quarter past five, the door light went on. Thinking that Lhana had managed to leave early, Manning hurried to throw open the door.

His smile of welcome faded as he looked at the two men in the black uniforms of the Galactic Police.

"Manning Draco?" one of them asked heavily.

"Yes," Manning said, "but—"

"We have a warrant for your arrest," the policeman interrupted. "Will you come with us quietly or do we have to put a paralyzer on you?"

"What's the charge?" Manning asked, a suspicion already gnawing at him.

"Obstructing the industrial process," the policeman intoned, "intent to sabotage, contempt of monopolies, and attempted seduction of personnel."

Manning had suspected J. Barnaby Cruikshank of sending the policemen; the list of charges confirmed it. He cursed with feeling.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked.

"To the offices of the Greater Solarian Insurance Company, Monoplated. Inasmuch as the plaintiff requested to see you, it is possible that you can get him to drop the charges."

"Oh, sure," Manning said bitterly. "He'll drop the charges. All I have to do is put my slave collar back on."

The policemen waited stolidly while Manning Draco left a message for Lhana on the door tape and then escorted him to their squad-flyer. A few minutes later they came down on the roof of the Greater Solarian building. Manning walked between them down to the familiar door of the president's office. The door-scanner recognized them and the door swung open.

J. BARNABY CRUIKSHANK was, at forty, one of the richest and most powerful men in the Galaxy. Normally, he was also the very picture of well groomed urbanity. This, however, was not true of him at the moment that the two policemen escorted Draco into his office. For once, his temper seemed to be well under control, but his rumpled hair and the wrinkles in his guaranteed non-wrinkleable plastic sport coat bore mute witness to his true emotional state.

"Good work," he said to the two policemen. "You may wait outside while I speak to him. If it's necessary to press the charges, I'll call you in."

The two policemen nodded respectfully and withdrew. J. Barnaby turned a baleful gaze upon his chief investigator.

"Good afternoon, Manning," he said, making it sound more like a malediction than a greeting.

Manning dropped into one of the comfortable chairs and stared at his boss. "J. Barnaby," he said, "I've always told you that some day you'd go too far. I think this is the day. I'm annoyed."

"You're annoyed," snorted J. Barnaby. "There hasn't been a case assigned to you in two months. For eight weeks you've done nothing but draw your salary. Then the first time I want to see you in the two months, you refuse to answer your phone. Well, you'll either go to work or I'll send you to jail."

"You're just the boy who'd do it, too," Manning said. He was already feeling better. The sight of J. Barnaby's rages always put him in good humor. He lit a cigarette and grinned. "Okay, call off your bloodhounds. I'll go to work." He waited until he saw J. Barnaby push a button on his desk. "Now, what's the problem?"

Inter-Galactic Trouble-Shooter

MANNING DRACO rides again!

The requests for more Manning Draco stories have risen to a veritable flood. No series character ever presented by TWS has rocketed to such heights of acclaim in so short a time as Ken Crossen's intergalactic trouble-shooter. We refuse to analyze Draco's elusive charm. It is something of an axiom in the publishing business that satire does not pay, that the general reader fails to appreciate the ridiculing of established customs. So here is Manning Draco, whom Mr. Crossen uses to poke fun at practically everybody and everything, drawing raves from readers of all sizes, shapes and ages. Frankly, we like it. Here's another Manning Draco story.

—The Editor

With what was obviously an effort, Cruikshank pulled himself together. He brushed back his hair, smoothed the wrinkles in his coat, and managed a strained smile as he forced himself to lean back in his chair.

"You know, Manning," he said, his tone almost suggesting that this was a casual visit, "I was sitting around this afternoon thinking of old times. Remember the good old days when our two best salesmen were Sam Warren and that Rigelian—what was his name?"

"Dzanku Dzanku," Manning said, watching J. Barnaby with wariness. If there were any one in the galaxy whom J. Barnaby hated above the Rigelian Dzanku Dzanku, Manning had yet to meet him—and the president of Greater Solarian never forgot the name of someone he hated.

"Oh, yes," J. Barnaby said with false heartiness. "Dzanku Dzanku. A splendid fellow. Remember how fond we've always been of him?"

"Wait a minute," Manning said. "Have you completely blown your jets? Dzanku and Sam Warren are the characters who almost cheated you out of millions—not once, but twice—and I'm the lad you sent out to stop them. Remember?"

"Mere boyish pranks," J. Barnaby said with a wave of his hand which erased all previous sins. "We should let bygones be bygones, Manning. It ill becomes Terrans to hold such grudges."

"Okay," Manning said amiably. "Dzanku is a fine fellow. Now what?"

"He's in trouble."

"What kind of trouble?"

"As I understand it," J. Barnaby said soberly, "poor Dzanku was under the impression that he might face prosecution in Federation courts, so he went to Pollux One. As you know, Pollux One is a Class D planet and therefore is not a member of the Federation. Dzanku married a Polluxian female, which automatically made him a citizen of Pollux and immune to Federation arrest."

"And then he broke some Polluxian law?"

"As a matter of fact," J. Barnaby said, "he broke seven thousand, eight hundred and twenty-six of the eight thousand laws in Pollux One. It would seem that Dzanku has once more become the victim of his own—er—youthful spirits."

"I feel," Manning said dryly, "that you could say excessively youthful spirits without being accused of hyperbole."

"Anyway, Dzanku has been found guilty and the death sentence has been passed. The execution is to take place within a month."

MANNING DRACO stared with suspicion at his boss. "Normally," he said, "this is a bit of news which would have been welcomed by you with joyous cries. You might have even declared a ten-minute holiday for the whole staff in celebration of the occasion. This scene of Cruikshank's turning the other cheek is touching but suspicious. What are you leading up to?"

"I was thinking," J. Barnaby said blandly, "that you might take a little run up to Pollux and rescue Dzanku."

The silence that followed was long, and filled with things which were better unsaid. Throughout, J. Barnaby managed to avoid looking directly at his chief investigator.

"Why?" Manning Draco asked quietly when he had considered and rejected all alternative comments.

"After all, my boy, Dzanku was once a member of our happy little family. It is only proper that we should stick by him in his time of travail."

"Rocket wash," Manning snapped rudely. "Somewhere in the saccharin story you've spun for me there's a joker that's going to cost J. Barnaby Cruikshank a few million credits. Either you give me the whole story or you can call your cops back and I'll go to jail. You wouldn't send me out to rescue your own mother unless she owed you money. Give."

"My boy, you wrong me," J. Barnaby said brokenly. He waited, but when Manning showed no signs of saying anything further, he decided to continue. "As a matter of fact, there is one other matter. It will cost us a few credits if Dzanku dies any time within the next six months."

"How much?" Manning asked relentlessly.

"Well—er—to be exact, one thousand billion credits."

Manning whistled. "That's quite a piece of change. Do you have that much?"

"I have that much," J. Barnaby admitted, "but if I had to pay out that much, I might have trouble staying in business. You save Dzanku and there will be a hundred thousand credit bonus for you."

"Now I know it's serious," Manning said. "What's the catch?"

"The catch," said J. Barnaby, "is that Dzanku Dzanku took out a thousand credit insurance policy when he went to work for us. It was such a small policy that, through an oversight, we neglected to cancel it when we fired him."

"A thousand credit policy?" repeated Manning. "What kind of clause is there in the policy that can force you to pay a billion to one?"

"Not in the policy," J. Barnaby said unhappily. "It's Pollux. There are only twenty-five families on the entire planet, although the population of Pollux One is twenty-five billion. Each family consists of one billion Polluxians. So when Dzanku married a Polluxian female he immediately had one billion heirs. And there is a Polluxian law which states that every relative of a policyholder must be considered a full beneficiary and paid the amount of the insurance policy. That's one billion times a thousand credits in the case of Dzanku. That's why we never have sold insurance on Pollux. Any Federation business must conform to the local laws of a non-Federation planet if it wishes to operate there."

"And that means they'd have no trou-

ble going into a Federation court and collecting if Dzanku dies while the policy is in force?"

J. Barnaby nodded glumly. "No trouble at all," he admitted. He eyed Manning. "My boy," he went on, "I'm sorry if my actions seemed harsh, but you're the only person who can save Greater Solarian. I knew that once you learned the facts, you wouldn't let me down. I have faith in you, Manning—"

"Spare me the dramatic act," Manning interrupted. "I'll see what I can do."

"I knew you would," J. Barnaby cried. He strode across the room and wrung Manning's hand. "My boy, you'll never regret it. My gratitude will know no limits—"

"You'll forget about it ten minutes after I've done it," Manning said. "And I'm only doing it for two reasons. The bonus and my own curiosity. Have you got an encyclotape on Pollux One?"

"It's already in your ship," J. Barnaby said, still wringing Manning's hand as he gently pushed him toward the door. "And I've ordered the crew at the spaceport to have your ship ready. Bless you, my boy."

II

AT THE spaceport, the *Alpha Actuary* was already on the launching level. Manning Draco climbed in, checked the position of Pollux One and fed the figures into the automatic pilot. He hooked the ship into magnetic power and it raced up the launching rack, flinging itself skyward.

When it was well above Terra's atmosphere, the ship automatically went into magnidrive. Manning found the Pollux encyclotape and fed it into the audio-reader. Then he leaned back to listen.

"Pollux One," said a pleasant voice from the concealed speaker, "is a Class D planet, not yet admitted to the Federation. It is a mean distance from its sun, Pollux, of eighty-nine million miles. Its mass is one-point-two in relation to that of Terra, its volume one-point-one-seventeen; its density is five-point-two-seven times that of water; its diameter, seven thousand two hundred miles; orbital velocity, eighteen-point-two miles per second; period of rotation, twenty-seven hours, fifteen minutes; eccentricity, oh-point-oh-two-oh-one—"

Manning reached over and punched a button. The tape skipped a few inches and took up its story again.

"— gravity at surface, one-point-one-oh-two. In many respects, Pollux One is similar to Terra. Geologically, they are in a period similar to that on Terra which was known as the Jurassic, although the general level of intelligent life is much higher than it was on Terra during that period.

"The dominant race on Pollux One is evolved from a race which is physically similar to the Terran Crocodilia. It has not, however, been possible for Federation scientists to make detailed examinations of Polluxians so it is not known in what ways they differ from Crocodilia other than intelligence.

"Pollux One is an empire, the present ruler being Emperor Aatobi Uu. The first two letters of his first name are silent, as is true in the case of every Polluxian, and merely indicate his social position. Only members of Emperor Uu's immediate family have names beginning with Aa. The royal family of Uu, however, consists of about one billion individuals, ranging in social status from Aa to Zz. There are only twenty-five family lines on Pollux—"

Manning cut off the audio-reader and went to sleep.

It was morning when the *Alpha Actuary* cut out of magnidrive and hovered just above the atmosphere of Pollux One. Manning Draco switched the ship to manual and took it down to a few thousand feet above the planet. He then contacted the small spaceport at Uuville, identified himself, gave his reason for coming to Pollux as personal, and requested landing instructions. After a

few minutes' delay a landing beam was sent up.

Leaving his ship in the landing cradle, Manning went into the terminal. It was almost deserted, although there were a few Polluxians staffing it. Manning had learned from the encyclotape that Polluxians had no space travel of their own and that few Federation ships came to the planet because local laws made trading difficult, so he was not surprised by the inactivity.

This was his first look at Polluxians. They did look a lot like the alligators and crocodiles on Terra, although it was plain that they had evolved somewhat differently. They stood erect on their two hind feet and what had once been their front feet had already developed into hands. It seemed to Manning that their snouts had shortened considerably. They were all wearing Terran-style clothing.

MANNING stopped at a lunch counter and waited until the Polluxian looked up.

"Do you speak Terran?" he asked.

"Of course," the Polluxian said, nodding. His mouth writhed in what was probably meant to be a grin, displaying long white teeth. "We are great admirers of Terra. Our one regret is that more Terrans do not visit us. May I help you?"

"Do you have a hotel that caters to Terrans?"

"Oh, yes. Uu House. Anyone of the taxis out front will take you there."

"Fine," said Manning. "Perhaps you can tell me one more thing. I want to visit someone who's in prison under sentence of death. How can I best find out where he is?"

"If he has already been sentenced to death, then he will be in the Oo Correction House. A taxi will take you there."

"Thanks," Manning said.

As he walked out of the terminal, he became aware that he was being watched. At first, he thought the watcher was a humanoid robot, but on closer look he saw that what looked like burnished metal was actually flesh. The figure resembled a robot in other respects too; the head was perfectly round with no features. There was a small opening in the front, not dissimilar to the speakers on robots. Above it was a larger oval opening, seemingly depthless, which was almost identical with the electronic-eye cage of a robot.

As he realized that this was not a robot, Manning stopped and stared at the figure. It seemed to be mumbling to itself and after a moment the words became clear. It was speaking Terran.

"Hmm. . . Terran male. Features receded enough to probably be considered attractive. Apparently of sound body—"

"Were you speaking to me?" Manning asked abruptly.

"About you," the other corrected. "You are a Terran, aren't you?"

"Yes, but what are you?"

The figure made a sound that might have been laughter. "Captain mmemmo of Andromeda Galaxy."

"Captain Mmemmo," Manning repeated. He examined the robot-like figure again. This was the first Andromedan he'd ever seen.

"No, no," the Andromedan said. "Captain mmemmo. Upper case C, lower case m. I trust you'll pardon me—" He stepped forward and probed Manning's arm with a forefinger. "Nicely fleshed," he added.

"If," Manning said dryly, "you're looking for a steak, I'm out of season."

"Young man," Captain mmemmo said, "how would you like to have security for your old age? Travel in exotic lands—taste the fruits of the fairest flowers—surrounded by the science of the sybarite—lulled in the lap of luxury—treated to a torrent of titillation—ten thousand credits for each year of service carefully banked in the institution of your choice?"

"What the devil are you talking about?" Manning demanded.

"A simple business transaction," Captain mmemmo said. "I am scouting your galaxy for all sorts of young males in good health for service in the Pleasure Camps of Andromeda*. If you don't care to go yourself, I'll be happy to buy any young male slaves you may possess."

"Sorry," Manning said with a grin, "but you've got the wrong customer. I haven't finished with the pleasures of my own galaxy yet."

"Oh, well," said the Andromedan, shrugging, "I'll be here until I get a shipload. If you should happen to change your mind just look up Captain mmemmo."

Manning grinned again and walked out of the terminal. He looked around for an air-taxi and it was some minutes before he realized that the only vehicles around were some rather peculiar ones on the ground ahead of him. But between him and the vehicles was something more familiar. It was a picket line.

A NUMBER of young Polluxians were marching vigorously up and down in front of the spaceport with hand-lettered signs. The lettering was in Terran and in another language which Manning guessed was Polluxian. The signs were mostly on the same theme.

DOWN WITH TERRA—POLLUX FOR POLLUXIANS, TERRA FOR TERRORISTS —TERRANS ARE ANTI-OVIPAROUS— DECADENT TERRANS NOT WANTED.

Trudging along at the end of the picket line was a small Polluxian bearing a sign which read:

GIVE YOUR CHILDREN A BETTER START IN LIFE AT THE OU HATCHERY.

Just beyond the picket line a Polluxian stood on an improvised box and harangued the pickets.

"Fellow Tetrapods," he was saying, "we must protect the fair plains of Pollux from these puny Terran marauders. There's one now," he cried, flinging an arm in the direction of Manning. "Look at him. Look at the ugly nose, no larger than a wart; look at the tiny mouth and teeth so small they can have no use at all. Are these the lords of the universe? Are these the creatures who would rule us finer specimens? Arise, ye prisoners—you have nothing to lose but your brains!"

Manning Draco grinned and walked past the speaker. The only vehicles in sight were a number of objects which looked a little like bicycles built for two. On the front seat of each one sat a Polluxian.

"Taxi, sir?" asked the nearest one.

Manning nodded and, after a moment of hesitation, climbed on the rear seat. They started off, the Polluxian pedaling with his tail. Back of them, Manning could hear the speaker raising his voice once more.

"Where to, sir?" the Polluxian asked.

"The Oo Correction House," Manning said. "What's going on back there?"

"That's Pseno Ai," the driver explained. "He's the head of the Anti-Terran Political Party. He arranges a small demonstration at the spaceport every day."

"Are there so many Terrans moving in on Pollux?"

"Oh, no. You are the first Terran to come here in more than five gestations —two and a half years by your reckoning."

"Are there many Terran industries here then?" Manning asked.

"None."

"Then why an anti-Terran party?" Manning wanted to know. "It seems a waste of time."

"Oh, no," the driver said seriously. "We look upon the activity of Pseno Ai with pride. It is a sign of progress.

*Even now, not too much is known about general conditions in the Andromeda Galaxy. It is known, of course, that the entire galaxy is a matriarchal society and it may be assumed, from the presence of the Pleasure Camps, that it is in a stage of moral decadence. The first Andromedan slavetraders to appear in our galaxy came with the idea of stealing inmates for the Pleasure Camps, but the Federation patrols quickly changed their minds for them. Since then, like Captain mmemmo, they have bargained for slaves or for impoverished young males willing to gamble a few years' virility for security.

Besides, as Pseno Ai points out, it doesn't hurt to be prepared. Who knows but what you may be the first drop in a flood of Terrans to come?"

Manning grunted something between affirmation and denial. The Polluxians seemed friendly enough, but he saw no reason for arguing with individuals who sported teeth that were a good four inches long.

After a short ride through the edge of the city—and past a towering barbaric structure which the driver said was the palace—they came to a plain stone building. The bicycle stopped and its driver indicated the building. Manning dismounted and paid him.

HE WAS interviewed by numerous officials in the prison and finally escorted back to an isolated cell. Its occupant looked up and waved a tentacle in greeting.

"Hello, Manning, my knight in shining armor," he said sardonically.

The Rigelian Dzanku Dzanku was no taller than Manning, but he weighed all of a ton, Terra scale. His thick, square torso was supported by two legs like tree trunks. Six weaving tentacles projected from the upper part of his body. His face was small and expressionless, with three eyestalks raised several inches above it.

"Hello, Dzanku," Manning responded. He waited until the Polluxian guard shuffled off. "I can't remember seeing you in more appropriate surroundings. This is an ideal setting for your particular sort of beauty."

"Thank you," the Rigelian said, playing it straight. "I appreciate the compliment even though I know how eager you are to release me from this durance vile. I've continually comforted myself with the thought of my two dear friends, Manning Draco and J. Barnaby Cruikshank, moving the universe in my behalf. And how is my dear pal, J. Barnaby?"

"Concerned about your welfare."

"I'll bet," said Dzanku, with the Rigelian equivalent of a grin.

"He was also," Manning said dryly, "working himself into quite a sentimental lather over the good old days when you and Sam Warren were part of the happy Cruikshank family, but he'll get over that the first time he has a chance to cancel your policy. By the way, where is Sam Warren*?"

"I'm not sure," Dzanku said. "He came here with me, but didn't stay long. Although they liked him, the local feminine pulchritude didn't strike Sam's fancy. I believe he had some small business venture in mind."

"No doubt," Manning agreed. "What's the rap on you, Dzanku?"

"Almost everything," the Rigelian said. "I believe, however, the thing which tipped the scales against me was a slight error in judgement. I sold the Emperor a small planet in the Acamarian system. I had no idea he'd try to claim his property so quickly."

"And you've been sentenced to death?"

"A mere trifle now that you're here," Dzanku said.

"If it's such a trifle," Manning snapped, "suppose you tell me how to get you out."

"But that's your problem, my dear Manning," Dzanku said blandly. "Of course, if all else fails, you can fall back on the hostage law of Pollux. I'm sure that J. Barnaby will appreciate such a move."

"What is the hostage law?" Manning asked suspiciously.

"It is possible to obtain the release of any prisoner by merely putting yourself in his place. So if everything else fails you can always go to the execution chamber in my place. It will bring me great grief, but—" He made a gesture of hopelessness with his six tentacles.

Manning told him what he could do with his grief. "As far as I'm con-

*Sam Warren, a Terran, and Dzanku Dzanku, had originally sold insurance for the Greater Solarian Insurance Company, Monopolated. Later, they had turned their combined talents to trying to defraud the company and they might have become the greatest team of rogues in the galaxy if it hadn't been for Manning Draco. See Thrilling Wonder Stories for October 1951 and February 1952.

cerned," he added, "you could rot in here; it would even be worth losing the bonus J. Barnaby mentioned. But J. Barnaby wants you rescued, so I'll do my best. Do you have any other suggestions? More practical ones."

"There must be loopholes on some of their laws," Dzanku said. "That should be more in your line than mine. Or maybe you can get on the good side of the Emperor and get him to release me."

"You're a big help," Manning said. "Okay, I'll see what I can do." He left, and was escorted to the exit by a guard.

ON THE street again, he looked around for one of the strange Polluxian taxis. There were none in sight, but there was something that looked like six bicycles fastened together in tandem. There were five Polluxians, wearing bright uniforms, seated on it. The sixth seat was empty and there was a bright red umbrella over it. As Manning drew near, one of the gayly festooned Polluxians dismounted and came to meet him.

"Do I address the Terran, Manning Draco?" he asked.

"Yes," Manning admitted.

"It is the pleasure of Aatobi Uu, most beautiful Emperor of Pollux, that you present yourself at his palace as his guest."

"That's very nice of him," Manning said, "but I'm here on business, so I don't think I'd better accept—"

The Polluxian bared his huge teeth in a mirthless grin. "It is against the law to refuse any request by the Emperor," he said. "The penalty is death."

"In that case," Manning said hastily, "I accept."

He climbed onto the empty seat, feeling rather silly as he sat there beneath the red umbrella, and the bicycle-built-for-six pulled away from the curb.

The palace was a huge, sprawling edifice built of stone, looking as if it had been constructed by whim rather than any plan. Manning was led through room after room, past rows of saluting guards, and finally into the royal presence. So far as Manning could see at a glance, the Emperor looked just like any other alligator except for the toga-like garment wrapped around his body and the crown which sat jauntily on his head. There was one other Polluxian in the room, a female, Manning judged, from the fact that she wore a garment similar to a dress, and held a fan before her face. At frequent intervals something resembling giggles sounded from back of the fan.

"Welcome to Pollux," the Emperor said after he'd waved the escort from the room. "I am honored."

"On the contrary," Manning said politely, "I am honored."

"Of course you are," agreed the Emperor. "But I am also honored as we are very fond of Terrans. You are a Terran, aren't you?"

Manning nodded.

"I thought so," the Emperor said. "It did not seem likely that there could be two races in the galaxy with such brief snouts and such inadequate teeth. You know, you Terrans are very ugly by all intelligent standards, but it is an ugliness which we find appealing."

Manning nodded and smiled, thinking that nothing could be gained by telling him how Polluxians appeared to Terrans.

"I presume you come from a good family?" the Emperor said.

"Good enough," Manning said, wondering what difference it made.

The Emperor indicated the other figure in the room. "This is my daughter, the Princess Aaledo Uu."

Manning Draco said hello and the princess giggled from behind her fan.

"She saw you as you passed the palace earlier," the Emperor said. "It has come into her head that she would like you for a husband. I do not find it in my heart to deny her anything."

The princess giggled again, one lizard-like eye peeping over the edge of the fan.

There was a moment of strained silence as the full import of the Emperor's

statement impressed itself on Manning.

"I am honored," he managed finally, "but—but, unfortunately, there are obstacles. There is a Federation law forbidding the marriage of different races."

"A very foolish law," agreed the Emperor. "I'm sure that in time it will be abolished. In the meantime, we need not concern ourselves too much with it. Pollux is not a member of the Federation and we have our own laws here."

"B-but," stammered Manning, "I am a citizen of the Federation and subject to its laws."

"A mere technicality," said the Emperor, thumping his tail on the floor with satisfaction. "The moment the marriage ceremony is performed, you will become a Polluxian—and a member of the royal family, at that."

"But—" Manning tried again.

"No more," the Emperor interrupted. "I appreciate your eagerness—the Princess Aaledo is famous for her beauty—but we must observe the conventions. Tomorrow we will discuss the details and the date of the wedding. Now it is time for us to attend the engagement banquet I have ordered."

III

FROM every view except Manning's, the banquet was a big success. The leading Polluxians were there. The table groaned beneath a variety of food, some of it edible even to a Terran, and there were plenty of exotic alcoholic beverages. The prospective bride was radiant, by Polluxian standards, and if the groom-to-be seemed a little pale and preoccupied it was attributed to the shock of his sudden good fortune.

As early as possible Manning Draco excused himself, pleading fatigue from his trip, and was shown to his room. He told the servant that he'd like to make a call to Terra and, since it was understandable that the Terran might want to brag a bit, a video set was brought to his room. As soon as he was alone he feverishly put in a call for J. Barnaby Cruikshank, his boss.

After a few minutes' delay the face of the president of Greater Solarian appeared on the screen.

"Well, my boy," he said heartily, "you've succeeded already?"

"No," Manning said sourly. "I'm through, J. Barnaby. As soon as everyone's asleep in this place, I'm sneaking out to the spaceport and getting out of here as fast as my ship will go."

There was a decided change in the expression of the face on the screen. "I wouldn't, if I were you," J. Barnaby said coldly. "Those charges against you can still be renewed, and if you leave there'll be a patrol ship waiting for you just outside the Polluxian limits."

"But you don't understand," Manning said. "Look, J. Barnaby, I've never run out on a job, but this is different. These Polluxians are nothing but fancy alligators and they have a taste for Terrans—and maybe it is a *taste* at that. Anyway, the Emperor has just decided that I'm to marry his daughter. If I stay here and refuse, I'll be swinging from the gibbet next to Dzanku's."

"On the other hand," said J. Barnaby, a calculating gleam on his face, "think of the advantages of being married into the royal family of Pollux. You can probably free Dzanku with no trouble at all. Not only that, but you can then use your influence with your father-in-law to have the local laws changed so we can come into Pollux and sell insurance. Your commissions on such a deal would add up to a tidy sum, my boy."

"To hell with the commissions," Manning said roughly. "You know what you can do with them. If you think it's such a good idea, you come up here and marry the princess."

"I am already married," J. Barnaby said with dignity. "And I've always thought that marriage would be a steadying influence on you. Believe me, Manning, I have your best interests at heart."

Manning's reply made the censor on Procyon wince.

"Let me know the date of the wedding," J. Barnaby said cheerfully, "and I'll send you a handsome wedding present. It's the least I can do." He broke the connection and the screen faded.

Manning cursed until he was out of breath. Then he just sat and glared at the dead screen.

AFTER a while there was a knock on the door. Manning thought of ignoring it, but when it was repeated he went and threw open the door. A Polluxian stood there, his tail impatiently thumping the floor.

"I have come," he said in a sonorous voice, "to tell you that we don't like Terrans on Pollux. If you persist in meddling with our affairs, we'll make trouble for you."

Manning recognized him now as the Polluxian who had been making a speech earlier outside the spaceport. "You'll make trouble for me," he said with a wry grin. "You might as well come in and tell me about it, but I warn you it'll be an anticlimax."

The Polluxian stepped inside and closed the door. He whipped a wallet from his pocket and flipped it open. "Federation Bureau of Investigation," he said, lowering his voice.

The card in the wallet, with picture and prints, identified him as Albert Sauri, an investigator for the Federation Bureau of Investigation.

"Now I've heard of everything," Manning said. "What are you—a Polluxian who offered to work for the Federation?"

"I'm from Terra," the investigator said proudly. "Graduate of the FBI Special Training School."

Manning Draco stared in amazement at his visitor. "I thought," he said, "that I was pretty well aware of what went on in the Federation, but this is a new one on me. First, if you're from Terra you must be an alligator."

"Crocodile," corrected the investigator

"Crocodile, then. But to the best of my knowledge there has never been but one Terran species—Man—that had the power of speech. Parrots have it in a limited fashion, but only in an imitative way."

The investigator rubbed his scaly jaw. "This is top priority stuff," he said, lowering his voice, "but I checked with my bureau chief and he authorized me to talk to you. The Special Training Schools were set up five hundred years ago on Terra to train non-human Terrans for jobs as undercover agents*. I was a member of the first graduating class of ten years ago."

"After five hundred years?" Manning asked. "It was about time you graduated."

"No, no," said Albert Sauri, "it's just that my generation was the first to have mutated sufficiently to receive the final training. Some other time, I'll be happy to give you a rundown on the whole project. It's rather interesting. In the meantime, if you'd like to check on my authority, I suggest you call my bureau chief."

"That won't be necessary," Manning said. "I know that the FBI identity cards can't be forged or stolen.** I don't know why the FBI has decided to interfere here, but I can tell you that it's pretty damn welcome."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

Manning had a moment of worry. "Aren't you here because the Emperor has decided I'm to marry his daughter?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, that's what I meant," Manning said, relieved. "I was sitting here wondering how the hell I'd get out of it and here you are like an answer to a prayer."

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*The Special Training Schools of the FBI were, of course, more than schools. The program had started with the selection of Terran animals which were similar to various dominant species on other planets. Through controlled genetics, mutants were eventually produced who were capable of being trained as undercover agents. Albert Sauri, alias Pseno Ai, was one of the resulting mutants.

**FBI identity cards are made of a secret plastic formula, the chief ingredient being Theocite, or ZO^2H. The only source of Theocite is the asteroid Theo which is owned by the FBI. The identity cards will also destroy themselves if touched by anyone other than the person for whom they're made.

THE FBI agent flipped his tail out behind him and sat down on the edge of the bed. He explored a four-inch tooth with his thumbnail and stared solemnly at Manning Draco.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that there's some slight misunderstanding, Mr. Draco. I'm not here to stop you from becoming the morganic husband of the Princess Aaledo Uu. In fact, the FBI looks upon the marriage with considerable favor."

"What?"

"That is correct," the FBI agent said. He held up a scaly hand as Manning was about to speak. "Just a minute, Mr. Draco. The Bureau believes that Pollux will eventually become a serious trouble spot of the galaxy. Since I've been assigned here I've become one of the leaders of the anti-Terran movement and I can tell you that if anything the Bureau is underestimating the danger. Unless something is done Pollux will become the nucleus of a movement which might cause Terra to lose its control of the galaxy."

"But what the devil," burst out Manning, "does that have to do with me marrying a—a Polluxian?"

"It might make all the difference between success and failure. It's not only a question of the influence you could have on your father-in-law, the Emperor, but also one of the propaganda value of a Terran being part of the royal family. With you working closely with me, we can probably whip this planet into line within a very few years. You can be sure you'll be properly rewarded."

"Who wants it?" Manning shook his head grimly. "I won't do it. When it comes to a thing like marriage, a man has to draw the line somewhere. Look, I got nothing personal against the saurian family—I'm quite willing to have a crocodile as my best friend—but I'll be double damned if I'll share my bed and board with an animated reptile. Especially my bed."

"It's your patriotic duty," thundered the FBI agent. He glared at Manning for a moment and then went on in a softer voice. "I'm sorry, Mr. Draco, I'd hoped that it wouldn't be necessary for me to point out certain other things to you. But if the Emperor wants you to marry his daughter there is no way of refusing. The lightest punishment you could expect would be death, and you'd be lucky to be executed. You might also face the fact that the FBI would go to almost any length to keep you from refusing. In fact, knowing how you feel about it, I shall see to it that your ship is guarded from now on. We wanted to think that you would voluntarily help your planet, your galaxy—but one way or another, sir, you're going to."

The FBI agent got up and strode across the room, his heavy tail stiff with dignity. "I would suggest," he said, "that you arrange for the wedding to take place as quickly as possible. The quicker you are in position to help us the better. And we expect you to do your duty, Mr. Draco." He opened the door and stepped into the hall. He glanced both ways and then looked back into the room. His mouth stretched in what was meant to be a smile. "It really isn't as bad as you make it, Draco. I've seen the princess and she's quite a dish. I could almost go for her myself."

"Then why the hell don't you?" snapped Manning, but the door had already closed before he got it out. He was once more alone in his room.

THERE had been little about his visitor to improve Manning Draco's morale. He brooded about it for a few minutes and then clutched at what seemed like a small chance. As he'd remarked earlier, he knew that FBI cards couldn't be forged, but then he'd suddenly remembered that crime was always progressing. Hopefully, he put through a call to a friend who worked in the Federation Bureau of Investigation. He kept the contact open while his friend checked.

"Sorry, Manning," said his friend

when he reappeared on the screen. He was grinning broadly. "Albert Sauri is for real. And there's already a folder on your forthcoming marriage. It's got a top priority sticker on it and it's stuck in the Inter-Planetary Politics drawer, so I guess there's nothing you can do but hope she'll change her mind."

"But there's got to be some way," Manning insisted. "There must be something you can do. Talk to the guy in charge."

His friend shook his head. "Anything that falls into Inter-Planetary Politics is under the supervision of John Allen Stover himself, and you know what he's like. He'd put the blast on his own mother if it'd help the record of the Bureau. There's only one thing I can do for you, Manning, old boy."

"What's that?" Manning asked desperately.

"Well, I'm attached to the Special Schools—the ones that turned out Albert. When this fall is all over, I can talk to some of our students and have you made an honorary crocodile." A loud guffaw came from the screen and Manning had a vision of his friend doubled over in mirth.

"Funny fellow," he muttered bitterly as he snapped off the set. He'd barely turned it off when there was a knocking on his door. He glared suspiciously at it, but finally called out, "Come in."

The door opened and a round, burnished head appeared. It was Captain mmemmo, the raider from the Andromeda Galaxy.

"Ah, young man," he said. "Happy youth, sitting here, no doubt, anticipating your future marital bliss? Basking in the buxom beauty of the bride?"

"Go to hell," Manning said.

The Andromedan cocked his head to one side. "Do I detect a note of discontent? Perhaps a bit of reluctance to take the final plunging step? If so, then Captain mmemmo's your man."

"What do you mean?" Manning asked.

"I offer you, young sir, not only escape from the gruesome web of matrimony, but escape from the humdrum existence of this galaxy. Escape and exotic pleasures, plus a royal stipend."

"The Pleasure Camps?"

"The Pleasure Camps. Where a man may—"

"Get out," Manning said.

"But you will keep me in mind—" the captain began.

Manning picked up a bowl from the table and flung it. The door closed gently and the bowl shattered against it.

Manning Draco paced the floor and tried to find a hole in the trap that was slowly closing about him. It was an almost impossible task and he knew it even as he struggled with it. He walked the floor and smoked and cursed, but nothing rewarded his effort.

THERE WAS another sharp knock on the door.

Manning stopped walking and regarded the door. He almost hoped it was Captain mmemmo returning; throwing someone out of his room would at least be a definite action.

"Come in," he called.

The door opened and two Polluxians marched stiffly into the room, closing the door behind them. They stared at Manning from great bulging eyes, then bowed in his direction.

"What do you want?" Manning demanded. He was in no mood to be polite.

"This," said one of them, indicating his companion, "is Bbtula Eo."

"That's nice," Manning said. "Goodby."

"I," continued the Polluxian, "am Dsorma Io, his friend and companion. I am authorized to speak for him."

"Fine," Manning said. "Go ahead and speak for him. Only do it somewhere else."

"Perhaps you do not understand," said Dsorma Io. "Until today Bbtula Eo lived in a state of supreme happiness, for the Princess Aaledo had gazed upon him and found him fair. Then you came along and stole her love."

"It's petit larceny as far as I'm con-

cerned," Manning snapped, "and he can have it back. In fact, the quicker he takes the princess back the better I'll like it."

The two Polluxians spoke to each other in a language which Manning could not understand. Then the first one turned back to him.

"Bbtula Eo wishes to understand what you are saying," he explained. "Is it possible that you mean that you do not wish to marry the Princess Aaledo?"

"That's the general idea," Manning said.

"Then Bbtula Eo has been doubly insulted. Once on behalf of himself and once on the part of the fairest flower of Polluxian royalty. He demands satisfaction."

"Meaning what?" Manning demanded shortly.

"Meaning a duel. It is my duty, as Bbtula Eo's appointed spokesman, to inform you that the duel will take place tomorrow at the ninth hour after sunrise, according to the law of Pollux. Since you are an alien to Pollux, I will further point out that it is illegal to lengthen your teeth artificially, or to sharpen your teeth to a point, or to take any other dental steps which might give you an unfair advantage."

"Teeth?" said the startled Manning. He glanced at Bbtula Eo, who immediately gave him a formal smile, revealing a generous expanse of ivory. "You mean this duel is a biting contest? You can't do that."

"The duel-by-teeth," the Polluxian said, "has been the accepted method of combat for centuries. Any other form of fighting would obviously be barbarous. We shall see you tomorrow, sir."

The two Polluxians bowed stiffly and were gone.

When he could move, which was not for several minutes, Manning Draco staggered over and locked the door to his room. He felt that he'd had all the visitors he was capable of receiving. Then he went back and flopped on the bed. He was asleep almost the moment he touched the bed, and he slept soundly all night. Even his nightmares were preferable to reality.

IV

IT WAS a somewhat haggard Manning Draco who emerged the next morning and wandered through the palace. The royal court, he soon discovered, was all agog at the prospect of both a duel and a wedding.

He finally entered a room which looked as if it might be a dining room. All too late he discovered he was sharing it with a female Polluxian who giggled from behind a fan. It was the Princess. In between nervous giggles she wanted to know how he slept, what he thought of Pollux, if he'd enjoyed the space trip, and a hundred other things. Manning answered in monosyllables, paying more attention to keeping his distance.

"Ah, billing and cooing already," said a new voice. The Emperor had entered the room. He thumped the floor solidly with his tail and servants began serving breakfast at once. "My boy, I can't tell you how proud I am of you. I've already heard about your acceptance of the duel with Bbtula Eo."

"Acceptance," Manning said bitterly. "Was there a choice?"

"Of course," continued the Emperor, "the duel can still be avoided, although I'm sure you have no desire to do so."

"How?" demanded Manning.

"Such haste would be unseemly, but we could hold the wedding before the time set for the duel. Members of the royal family are forbidden to duel."

Manning almost choked on the bit of egg he was eating. "No," he said hastily, "I wouldn't think of trying to avoid the duel."

The Emperor nodded with pleasure and went on talking about various trifles. Manning barely listened, finishing his breakfast as quickly as he could. He had finally realized that there was only one small hope for him and he'd determined to pursue it. Consequently, as

soon as he'd finished eating, he arose from the table.

"I have a few personal errands to run," he said, "but I'll be back by lunchtime."

"Take the royal sexcycle," said the Emperor. "It is proper that one who is about to duel should straighten out his affairs. By the way, the duel will be held after lunch. If you win, we will immediately discuss the date of the wedding. If not, my daughter will observe the natural period of mourning."

Manning winced at this blunt mention of a possible outcome of the duel. He nodded and left the room, followed by the sound of girlish giggling.

Downstairs, in front of the palace, he discovered the same six-seated, six-wheeled vehicle on which he'd ridden the day before. He ordered the uniformed Polluxians to take him back to the prison. He had determined that if Dzanku Dzanku wanted to be saved he'd have to do some saving in return. He was confident that the Rigelian would have more ideas on ways to circumvent local laws than anyone else.

He was just entering the prison when he saw the burnished figure of Captain mmemmo leaving. There was no way to avoid a meeting, but to his surprise the Andromedan merely waved a greeting and strode briskly by.

ONCE AGAIN, Manning was escorted through the prison and left in front of Dzanku's cell. Manning peered in and saw the Rigelian gripping the bars with two tentacles while his entire body shook as though with the ague.

"What's the matter with you?" Manning asked. There was no answer and he spoke more loudly. "Dzanku! What's wrong?"

Slowly, the body of the big Rigelian calmed down. Only when the shaking had completely stopped did his eyestalks straighten up and incline toward Manning. There was a note of strain in his voice when he spoke.

"That damned Andromedan," he said. "He's gone now, but we Rigelians are allergic to Andromedans. One of them anywhere within two hundred yards causes havoc in our nervous systems. And he has the nerve to offer to get me to one of his Pleasure Camps. I'd much rather be here. . . Well, Manning, how are we doing?"

"Not so good," Manning said. "I need your help, Dzanku. Since I left you yesterday, I've become engaged to the Emperor's daughter."

"Capital," exclaimed Dzanku. "You don't need help, my friend. I couldn't have planned it better myself. All you have to do is wait until you're married and then pardon me yourself."

"But I don't want to get married."

"A mere bagatelle," Dzanku said loftily. "Don't forget that J. Barnaby will be gravely disappointed if you don't save me. Besides, these Polluxian females make excellent wives."

"Speak for yourself," Manning said. "You see, Dzanku, if I really have to marry this royal horror, so far as I'm concerned the worst will have already happened. So I will merely let you die and let J. Barnaby go broke. In fact, those will be the only two bright spots in my life. Get it?"

"Manning, you wouldn't!" Dzanku's three eyes stared reproachfully at him.

"I will," Manning said firmly. "I don't mind pulling J. Barnaby's or your chestnuts out of the fire as long as I can do so without getting burned. But if I have to get scorched, I don't care how many blisters you get. Now, do you want to play ball?"

"There is no loyalty left in the universe," Dzanku exclaimed piously. "I suppose I have no choice. What do you want of me?"

"First," said Manning, "if there's anyone who'll be up on trickery on this planet, it's you. How do I get out of fighting a duel-by-teeth? I've been challenged by a blighted suitor of the Princess."

"You could get out of it by marrying the Princess before the time for the

duel," Dzanku suggested cheerfully.

"I know that one. But if that's the best you can do, there'll be no pardon."

"Okay, okay, let me think." Dzanku was silent for a moment, his tentacles undulating gently. "Yeah, I remember," he said finally. "I knew there was something because I once thought I was going to have to fight one of those duels and my teeth are no better than yours. Anyway, I worked out a gimmick. When you spring it on your opponent, he'll scream his head off, but it's perfectly legal so he'll have to allow it or withdraw." Dzanku chuckled in appreciation of his own cleverness.

"What is it?"

"The dueling law states that you can't artificially lengthen your own teeth, but it *doesn't* say that you have to personally bite the other guy to win. There's a record of a duel where the friend of one of the duelists got mad, jumped in the ring and glomped off the head of the opponent and it was allowed. That's where I got the idea. Also there's no rule about whether you have to ride or walk during the duel. . . . The Princess likes you?"

"Yeah," growled Manning.

"Okay, you can get her to help without knowing it. Go in a local delicacy store and buy a large Polluxian pepper. Tell the Princess that it'll bring you good luck if she can get the other guy to wear the pepper on his head. Get her to pretend that it's because she wants him to win. These Polluxians love intrigue and she'll fall for it. And if he's a suitor, he'll be a sucker for anything she wants him to do."

HOW WILL that help? Are you counting on the pepper flopping in his eyes or something like that?" Manning demanded.

"You'll see," Dzanku said cheerfully. "Next, when you leave here, get a taxi—"

"I've got a palace go-cart," Manning interrupted. "One of those bicycles-built-for-six, with five uniformed flunkeys."

"In style, huh?" Dzanku grunted. "Well, tell them you want to go to Xleno's Fly-Ur-Self, downtown. It's a rental palace run by Xleno Ii. He's my brother-in-law, and he'll give you a special price if you mention my name. Rent one of his best pterodactyls."

"What?" asked Manning.

"Pterodactyl," Dzanku said. He chuckled again. "That's a big lizard that can fly—but you'll think it's jet-propelled when you get on it. It's got a bigger mouth, and bigger, meaner teeth than any Polluxian. And it's crazy about Polluxian peppers."

"Are you sure it isn't crazier about Terrans?" Manning wanted to know. Suspicion of Dzanku Dzanku was an automatic reaction.

"Oh, it would take a bite out of you if it had the chance," the Rigelian said, "but it'll be saddled and bridled and there are blinkers on the bridle. As long as it can't see you it won't try to bite you. I suggest that you rent the pterodactyl as soon as you leave here. Take it to the large field back of the palace—that's where all the duels are held—and tether it there until the duel. By then it'll be good and hungry. When the duel starts, take the pterodactyl up to a good height and then just hold on. It'll do its own spotting of the pepper."

"Then what happens?"

"The pterodactyl goes for the pepper and when he takes it that boy's head is going to go right along with the pepper. The pterodactyl isn't particular how much garbage is attached to something he wants to eat. The duel will be over and you will be the hero of the day—a fit mate for the royal princess."

"That's what I'm afraid of," Manning said gloomily. "How do I get out of that? I'm perfectly willing to help you escape, Dzanku, but not at that price. If I can't get out of marrying her, the whole deal's off. What about using the pterodactyl to pull a raid on the prison here?"

Dzanku shook his head. "A lost cause, my boy," he said. "If you had a whole army of pterodactyls, you could never

make a dent on this prison."

"What then?"

"It represents a problem," admitted Dzanku. "The only solution which I can see immediately is for you to marry the Princess. Then the moment the ceremony is over you can free me and then I will tell you how you can have the marriage annulled before it is consummated. How's that?"

"Meaning I have to trust you to deliver after I've freed you?" Manning said. "Nothing doing. I wouldn't trust you as far as I could throw you. Tell me your idea first."

"I confess," said Dzanku, "to a similar reluctance to trust you. Nothing would please you and J. Barnaby more than to have me come to an untimely demise, providing you could avoid paying the insurance benefits required under Polluxian law."

"But we can't," Manning said. "That's why you can trust me."

"No," replied Dzanku. "At best, the insurance policy has been a shaky lever from the start. There's always the chance the company will find a loophole which will enable them to cancel the policy. That's why I like this marriage of yours. It's better insurance for me than the Greater Solarian policy. So Manning, I'm afraid you'll have to either trust me or find a way which will insure mutual trust."

"Good old Dzanku," Manning said bitterly.

"Good old Manning," Dzanku echoed.

They glared at each other through the bars for several minutes. Then, at almost the same moment, both of them laughed.

"All right, Dzanku," Manning said. "I guess I can't blame you. We'll see what we can work out after the duel. Thanks for helping on that."

"It was a pleasure," Dzanku replied.

MANNING DRACO waved to the Rigelian and left the prison. Outside, he climbed on the sexcycle and ordered the uniformed Polluxians to take him downtown.

On the way, he stopped off at a store and bought a Polluxian pepper. Then he continued on downtown.

The sign said: Xleno's Fly-Ur-Self. Below that, in smaller letters, was the legend: We buy them—U fly them—Xleno Ii, Prop. So far as Manning could see, Xleno Ii looked exactly like every other Polluxian he'd seen—like a dressed-up alligator. His manner brightened as soon as Manning mentioned Dzanku.

"A clever boy," he said. "How is he?"

"Fine," said Manning. He went on to explain that he had come to Pollux to rescue the Rigelian, without going into any of the complicating details. "And now," he finished, "I'd like to rent a pterodactyl for the afternoon."

"Suppose you tell me what you have in mind," Xleno Ii said. "You want one for a long trip or a fast number?"

"I'm not sure," said Manning. "I have to fight a duel this afternoon and Dzanku suggested that I rent the pterodactyl for that. He also suggested that I arrange to have a pepper fastened to the head of my opponent."

"Ah," said Xleno Ii. His huge mouth spread in a grin. "That Dzanku! He is a clever one. A most astute thought." He raised his voice in a shout that sent one of his helpers scurrying out of the room. "Hey, boy. Put a saddle on Mabel." He turned back to Manning in obvious enjoyment. "Mabel is just the one for you. She is as ill-tempered and bloodthirsty as a Terran—you'll excuse the expression. I very seldom rent her, for she has to be ridden with full blinkers. Oh, she'll do nicely for your purpose. All you'll have to do is slip the blinkers when the duel starts and Mabel will do the rest. Come, Mr. Draco."

He led the way out of the private office into the main part of the building. Manning followed into a large bare room where the roof opened like a door. There was a strong, musty odor which reminded him of the reptile house in the Terra zoo.

"This is the mounting room," Xleno Ii

explained. "The boy will bring Mabel in here. You'll like Mabel."

"Yeah, but will Mabel like me," muttered Manning. "If she's as bloodthirsty as you say, will she bother to tell the difference between her rider and anyone else?"

"Mabel will bite only what she can see," the Polluxian explained. "Since she will not be able to see you, you will be safe. Even when you slip the blinkers, she will be able to see only straight ahead and below. Then your opponent will be wearing the pepper. If there's anything Mabel likes better than heads it's peppers. Ah, here she comes now. Isn't she a beauty?"

Beauty was hardly the word which Manning would have used to describe the creature which came into the room, accompanied by the slithering sound of scaled flesh and the overpowering reptile stench. It towered above Manning and the Polluxians, a strange wedding of bird and reptile which had also once, in the dim past, been known on Terra. Its long serpentine neck ended in a monstrous head and a double row of teeth which almost made Manning feel sorry for Bbtula Eo. Its wings were folded, but they looked as if they had a good thirty-foot spread. There was a saddle nestling on its back between the wings. The bridle was a complicated affair completely covering both its eyes.

The Polluxian prodded the creature in the ribs and shouted, and the huge body folded to the floor.

"There she is, Mr. Draco," said Xleno Ii. He repeated his earlier statement, "Isn't she a beauty?"

Manning would have liked more reassurance on the safety, but decided there was no point in asking the same question over and over. He clutched his package tightly and tried to ignore the pounding of his heart as he climbed into the saddle.

"Just pull up on the bridle when you want her to go up," Xleno Ii said. "Flick her on top of the head with the reins when you want her to go down. There's a catch on the top of her bridle to open and close the blinkers." He and his helper drew back. "Good luck, Mr. Draco," he shouted.

"I'll need it," muttered Manning. He pulled up on the bridle and felt the pterodactyl lurch up from the floor. A moment later they were through the roof and flying over the city.

For a moment he was concerned only with keeping his balance and trying not to look directly below. But after a time he began to get his bearings and steered the pterodactyl in the direction of the royal palace, which was easy to spot from the air.

HE BROUGHT it down on the large field in back of the palace and dismounted. He tied the reins to a large post, being sure to give a wide berth to the double row of teeth. He had more confidence in distance than in the blinkers. Then he hurried toward the palace.

There was just time to hunt out the Princess before lunch. He finally found her in one of the rooms near the dining room, the inevitable fan before her face, the inevitable giggle sounding from behind it. This was the first time he'd ever spoken directly to her and he tried to look more like the eager bridegroom than he felt.

"Princess Aaledo," he said, "I hope you will pardon this intrusion, but I find it difficult to stay away from your charm and—er—beauty."

She lowered her fan to smile at him and he found himself wishing she'd raise it again. He fixed his gaze on the ceiling and hoped she'd think him merely bashful.

"My dear husband-to-be," the Princess said, "my own eagerness is a match for yours. I've hardly rested since I first saw you yesterday."

"Of course, of course," Manning said hastily. "I was wondering if you'd do me a small favor?"

"Anything," she said breathily.

"Well," he said, "it's about the duel. Naturally I want to win it so we can be

married as soon as possible. In my world there is a belief that you will have good luck in a duel if you can get your opponent to wear some little token you have bought. I'm sure, however, that Bbtula Eo would refuse if I asked him; but I thought you might ask him to wear it for you. It's this Polluxian pepper I just bought. Would you ask him to wear it—on his head—as a favor to you?"

Princess Aaledo thought this was a little queer, but she was a well-reared princess who had been brought up with the realization that there were many odd races in the universe and one must respect even their strangest customs. So she nodded. "Of course, dear," she said.

"You're a sweetheart," Manning said. He hastily thrust the package into her hands and retreated before the conversation could get more personal. He could hear her tail thumping the floor with pleasure as he left.

Lunch was a gala affair that day. The dining room was filled with Polluxians. The lunch was quite good, but Manning found it difficult to enjoy his food surrounded as he was by such a host of gaping jaws and flashing teeth.

Later, he saw the Princess Aaledo over in a corner talking to Bbtula Eo. The latter was looking rather startled, but he was nodding his head, so Manning relaxed.

Shortly after lunch, there were a number of speeches by various Polluxians on the history and tradition of dueling. One young Polluxian recited a long and tiresome poem concerning the adventures of one of the greatest duelists. Then it was time for the main event.

V

WHEN they reached the field behind the palace it was already crowded with Polluxians who had come to watch. Manning Draco and Bbtula Eo listened to a long recitation of the rules and were then instructed to retire to opposite ends of the field and to come out on the first blast of the royal trumpets. As he walked away, Manning saw Bbtula Eo fastening the huge red pepper to the top of his head.. He grinned at the sight and headed across the field to where he had tethered the pterodactyl. It was still standing in the same spot.

Manning unfastened the reins and climbed into the saddle. Up to this point, apparently, no one had paid any attention to the tethered peterodactyl or connected it with the duel. Nor did anyone glance in his direction as he waited for the trumpets. Across the field, Bbtula Eo was marching up and down, bellowing, and everyone was watching him.

Then the trumpets sounded and Manning pulled up on the reins. The pterodactyl went up in the air with the beat of its powerful wings. Manning heard an excited roar from the crowd below. He caught a glimpse of Bbtula Eo staring upward in amazement.

Manning leaned over and fumbled at the top of the bridle. He found the catch and slipped it to one side. "Well, Mabel," he said softly, "the rest is up to you."

The pterodactyl swung its head from side to side and then it seemed to catch sight of the solitary figure on the field below. He felt the creature tensing its mighty muscles.

There was a bellow which almost shattered Manning's ear drums; then the peterodactyl relaxed its giant wings and dropped earthward with a suddenness which almost threw him from the saddle. He hung on desperately, tried not to look at the rapidly approaching ground. He had a brief glimpse of Bbtula Eo. The Polluxian looked as if he intended to stand his ground, but suddenly he bolted, the pepper flapping on his head as he ran.

Manning felt the pterodactyl swerve, saw the long neck snap downward. He closed his eyes and a moment later felt the mighty wings tense into action and knew they were going up again. He opened his eyes and took a quick look below. There was a sprawled figure on the ground. The pterodactyl was working

its jaws rhythmically. For a moment, Manning thought he was going to be sick.

Slowly he got a grip on himself. He leaned over and pulled the blinkers back on. Then he guided the peterodactyl over the field and set it down on the ground near the post. He quickly tethered it and started across the field. He could hear the buzz from the crowd, the mixed cheering and booing.

The royal party came to meet him. When he was almost up to them, one figure detached itself from the others and ran toward him. It was the Princess Aaledo. Before Manning could dodge, she had thrown her arms around him. He was almost crushed in the embrace. "Oh, Manning," she squealed, "you were so clever, so wonderful. You are truly my mate."

Manning dodged what was apparently meant to be a kiss on his ear, feeling that he'd probably saved an ear by so doing.

"Aaledo," the Emperor snapped as he came up. "That is not the way for a princess to act."

The Princess removed her arms from around Manning, to his great relief, and reverted to her fan and the giggle. He liked her better that way.

"My son," said the Emperor, "you have been declared the winner of the duel. I—ah—consulted with the judges while you were bringing down your mount and they have said that you were within your rights. It was extremely clever of you." The Emperor's tone was friendly, but there was a wary look in his eyes.

"Thank you," Manning said.

"They are hastening now to amend the rules so that others may not profit by your cleverness. Naturally," he added casually, "I am pleased to know that my royal family is to be enriched by the addition of one so clever. By the way, I thought I might tell you that while you will become the Royal Pretender upon your marriage to my daughter, the law would not permit you to become Emperor in the event that—ah—something happened to me."

MANNING stared at the Emperor for a moment, and then realized the explanation of the wary look. He laughed aloud. "Your Highness," he said, "should realize that Terra has a long tradition of being opposed to royalty. It would make me very unhappy to think I would ever have to become an emperor."

"Oh, well, everyone to his taste," said the Emperor, but he looked relieved. "Now that you have won the duel, I think we might come to the matter of your wedding. My daughter naturally wants it to take place quickly. Young blood runs hot." He managed a quite acceptable leer. "Would you prefer that we have the ceremony tonight or in the morning?"

This was a little quicker action than Manning had expected, but he'd thought out one angle. If it didn't work, he was lost unless he could make a run for it on Mabel.

"I too am anxious," he said, hoping he sounded as if he meant it, "but beoming a member of such a distinguished and royal family is a step which bears heavy responsibilities. I should like to feel that I am worthy of it. I was about to suggest that we have a long engagement while I prepare myself. After all, I am a stranger to Pollux and I should spend some time studying the wonders of your world."

"A very worthy attitude," said the Emperor, nodding his head. "I, myself, favor long engagements. Very well, my son, we shall announce the official engagement this evening and the marriage will be held two weeks from today."

Two weeks was hardly Manning's idea of a long engagement, but it at least was a breathing spell. Since the business of the duel, he was feeling confident that he could either work out something or force Dzanku Dzanku to help him. So he nodded, trying not to look too joyful.

Later, at the palace, he sent a palace guard to Xleno's Fly-Ur-Self with

money and a message for Xleno to pick up his pterodactyl. Manning felt that he'd gotten along fine with Mabel so far. He didn't want to push his luck.

Early the following morning Manning Draco was up and out of the palace. He'd arranged for a pass to the Royal Archives and he started wading through the laws of Pollux, hoping he could find some solution to his situation.

That first week he read from morning until night. It was dull work, especially since he found nothing which seemed to apply to him. During that week, too, as a result of his official engagement to Princess Aaledo, he was given a small palace near the large one. It was completely staffed with servants and slaves, and it would be their home after the wedding.

His first bright idea came not from the research in the archives but from the realization that he had suddenly become a slave owner. He'd paid little attention to the Polluxians who were part of his household until one night when, for the fourth time, he was telling Albert Sauri that he would not work with the FBI.

"We could, you know," said Albert, "use other pressures on you. We don't like to force Terrans to be patriotic, but this is an important mission."

"Everything's been done to me," Manning said shortly. "What else could you do?"

"Well, you're still a citizen of the Federation, and will be until you're married to the Princess. There is a Federation law against a citizen's indulging in slavery even on a non-Federation planet. I could pull you in for that."

"Go ahead," Manning said. "At least it would get me out of the marriage, and that's the only thing I want."

"But the penalty for slavery," Albert Sauri said gently, "is fifty years on Jupiter."

"Oh, go to hell," snapped Manning. He threw the FBI agent out. Then he put in a call to J. Barnaby Cruikshank and told him that he'd better use his influence to call off the FBI or the whole deal would be off. J. Barnaby promised. After the call, Manning was sitting still glaring at the screen when the idea struck him.

THE NEXT DAY he went to see the Emperor, and that afternoon a number of prison guards showed up at the small palace with Dzanku Dzanku. The Rigelian was wearing a regulation slave collar and there were heavy chains on his legs which guaranteed that he could never escape.

"Well," said Manning, when they were alone, "you're out of prison."

"In a manner of speaking," said Dzanku, indicating the leg chains. "In reality, I have merely traded in my old prison for a more portable model."

"But there's no death sentence over you," Manning said. "I had the Emperor commute your death sentence and you are now my property. No one else has any jurisdiction over you. All you have to do is show me how to get out of marrying the princess and I'll give you your freedom."

"Manning, old friend, you wound me," Dzanku said. "To think that you would believe that Dzanku Dzanku would fall for that gag like a callow youth."

"What's wrong?"

"If I help you, what guarantee do I have that it will do me any good? Even if you still wanted to keep your word and free me—which I seriously doubt—you'd be unable to. The minute I showed you how to get out of marrying the Princess, her father would toss you out of this palace and confiscate all of your Polluxian property. I'd be right back where I was. Personally, as much as I dislike being your slave, I prefer it to the alternatives. You set me free and when I'm beyond the atmosphere of Pollux, I'll send you a message telling you how to get off the hook."

"Now who's taking who for a sucker?" rejoined Manning.

It was another standoff. Manning Draco went back to spending his days in the Royal Archives poring over the

laws. Evenings he avoided the palace social life by pretending fatigue. He and Dzanku would play four-dimensional chess or Castorian triple rummy while he tried to trick Dzanku into showing some reaction to the customs and laws of Pollux. A couple of times, when the games were close, he tried quick mental stabs at the Rigelian, hoping to read his mind. But Dzanku's shield was always up and it invariably ended with the two of them glaring at each other.

It went on like that for another week. Finally, Manning's marriage was only two days off. There were only a few laws which he hadn't yet covered and his confidence had reached a low ebb. That night, after dinner, when he went in for his usual game with Dzanku, he took along a bottle of local liquor. He'd tried it before and didn't care much for it—Dtseea tasted a little like fermented swamp water—but he was feeling so low that he needed some sort of crutch.

"I thought I'd like to have a drink," he explained to Dzanku. "Care to join me?"

"I think I might take one," Dzanku said. "I've just heard that my wife has presented me with a new son. The least I can do is drink a toast to her achievement."

"Congratulations," Manning said automatically. He poured two drinks and handed one to Dzanku. Then the import of what he'd heard sank in. "Wait a minute," he said. "I don't mean to be indelicate, but it seems to me that you've been in jail too long—well, you've been in jail a good many months. Or was your wife allowed to visit you in jail? I hope I'm not hurting your feelings—"

"Not at all," Dzanku said. He sampled his drink. "These Polluxians have no palate, do they?. . . No, Manning, my presence or lack of it has no relationship to my wife's confinement. You see, Polluxians are oviparous—I suppose you know that. The females lay self-fertilizing eggs so that the males have no function in the raising of children. It's really a very convenient arrangement on the part of nature. Better than your planet's."

"That's strange," Manning said. "You'd think in such a culture they'd never have marriage."

"Oh, marriage is a recent innovation on Pollux and, as with any contact between the sexes, is purely a social arrangement for mutual pleasure. My wife, like any other Polluxian female, started having children the moment she became adult. In fact, she brought eight fine children to our marriage."

Manning stared at the Rigelian in the excitement of growing awareness. Then he forced himself to become casual. He took a drink from his glass and brought out the cards.

"Very interesting," he said idly. "I suppose Princess Aaledo has a few fine children around too."

"Oh, sure. Four or five, I think—" Dzanku suddenly broke off and looked at Manning. There was an expression of dismay in his three eyes.

Manning laughed. It was enough to tell him he was on the right track. He started dealing out the cards, slapping them down in gay abandon.

DZANKU muttered something in Rigelian. Manning couldn't understand it, but the tone was enough to tell him that Dzanku was swearing.

"I'm right, eh?" he said softly.

Dzanku glared at him for a minute and finally threw out his tentacles in a gesture of defeat.

"Probably," he admitted. "You caught me off guard that time."

"Don't worry," Manning said. "I'll still save your thieving life."

"I don't like the way you make it sound," muttered Dzanku.

Manning only laughed again. . . .

Early the following morning he was at the palace, and was soon shown into the Emperor's presence.

"Well," the Emperor said heartily, "tomorrow's the big day, eh? There's nothing like a wedding to give a country a festive air. What's on your mind, my boy? There's nothing too good for the

future Pretender of the Empire."

"A most serious matter has come to my attention," Manning said gravely. "Naturally, I came immediately to discuss it with you."

"Naturally," agreed the Emperor.

"I believe," said Manning, "that this is your daughter's first marriage?"

"Oh, absolutely. If that's what's worrying you, my boy, I can reassure you. Aaledo has had a very strict upbringing. I know how fussy you Terrans are about such matters."

"I understand, however," said Manning, "that the princess has a number of children?"

"Four, I believe," said the Emperor. "As any normal Polluxian female should. Surely you have no objections to your wife having children?"

"Not as my wife. But isn't there also a law on Pollux which states that any marriage between a Polluxian and an individual from another planet or system can only take place when the moral laws and traditions of both parties are fully respected?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then," Manning interrupted firmly, "I must regretfully call off my engagement to the Princess Aaledo. The idea of a bride who is an unmarried mother of four is offensive to my background and training. I would be the laughingstock of Terra."

"Oh, dear," said the Emperor. "The Princess will be terribly upset. Can't we fix this up in some way?"

"I'm afraid not," Manning said. "I am heartbroken over this myself, but, after all, traditions must be respected."

"Yes. Yes, I understand. Of course, I don't mind telling you that I'm just as glad. I wouldn't think of depriving my daughter, but I don't approve of intermarriage. Nothing personal, you understand, but you're pretty short in the tooth and I find your face rather flat and uninteresting. But I suppose that's a matter of taste."

"I like you too," Manning said, grinning.

"Under the circumstances," the Emperor continued, "I fear I shall have to ask you to leave the small palace and I'll have to take back the property I've given you."

"Under the law, Your Highness, that applies only to the offending party. Since in this case I am the offended one, legally I can retain everything you've given me."

"Oh, a space lawyer," snarled the Emperor. His friendliness had vanished.

"However," said Manning, "I'm quite willing to return everything to you except for one slave. The Rigelian, Dzanku Dzanku, I shall keep."

"Oh, all right," the Emperor said sullenly. He glared at Manning. "But you'll have to leave Pollux within twenty-four hours. I won't have my daughter's broken heart flaunted."

"I'll be glad to," Manning said.

VI

HE LEFT and returned to the smaller palace where he'd been living. He went to the video set and put in a call to J. Barnaby. It was only a few minutes before the face of the Greater Solarian president appeared on the screen.

"Relax, J. Barnaby," Manning said. "Your bank account is safe-temporarily."

"That's great. I knew I could depend on— What do you mean temporarily?"

"Well," Manning said airily, "I've saved Dzanku from the current death sentence, but of course he's still married to a Polluxian woman and, as you know, his insurance policy is still in force."

"Well, do something!" J. Barnaby said. "Can't you trick him into doing something so the policy can be cancelled? Or get the Emperor to divorce him. Or something."

"I don't believe the Emperor is feeling exactly friendly toward me just now," Manning said blandly. "By the way, wasn't there something about a bonus on this job for me?"

"Of course, of course. You know me,

my boy. J. Barnaby Cruikshank is always willing to pay for services."

"Good. If you'll increase the bonus to two hundred and fifty thousand credits, I'll see to it that you have a way of cancelling the policy."

"Two hundred and fifty thousand," howled J. Barnaby. "Are you out of your mind? I won't pay it."

"Suit yourself. Of course, you'll be taking a chance that nothing happens to Dzanku while the policy is still in force."

"But, Manning, if anything like that happened, I'd go broke."

"I'll send my condolences," Manning said coldly.

"Manning, my boy," J. Barnaby said emotionally, "how can you do this to me? After all, I've been like a father to you and—"

"Yes, you promised me a wedding present," Manning interrupted, "when it looked like I'd have to marry a Polluxian. I promised myself I'd get even and the only place to hurt you is in your bank account. So the price is two hundred and fifty thousand."

"But that was a joke, Manning." J. Barnaby managed a convincing laugh. "I wouldn't have let it happen."

"Two hundred and fifty thousand, J. Barnaby."

"Manning, my boy—"

"Two hundred and fifty thousand."

J. Barnaby knew when he was licked. "All right," he snapped. "I'll give it to you if you find a way for the policy to be cancelled within the next twenty-four hours."

"You and the Emperor are both in a rut with this twenty-four hour stuff," Manning said. "But it's a deal. Goodby." He broke the connection and left the building.

At the spaceport, he arranged for his ship to be checked over and then he went into the terminal. He waited until he finally caught sight of Captain mmemmo. He held a short conference with the Andromedan, at the end of which he handed over a set of keys.

He found a comfortable seat in the terminal and relaxed. It was perhaps half an hour later that there was a tremendous racket in the terminal. It was soon explained. A number of Polluxian guards appeared, literally carrying the still shackled Dzanku Dzanku. The Rigelian was struggling for all he was worth, but he was handicapped not only by his chains but by the fact that his whole body was quivering. Captain mmemmo strode briskly along behind the guards, directing them toward the field where his ship was cradled.

Dzanku was cursing violently in fifteen languages and a few dialects, but the tempo of his curses increased considerably when he caught sight of Manning. The latter stood up and waved, grining broadly. Then he went out to his own ship.

THE *Alpha Actuary* was five hundred miles out of Pollux when Manning saw the big silver ship of Captain mmemmo pass him. He watched it go into overdrive and vanish in the direction of the Andromeda Galaxy.

Manning put his own ship into magnidrive and then sat down and called J. Barnaby Cruikshank.

"What do you want now?" snapped J. Barnaby as soon as he recognized Manning.

"Just wanted to be sure that you're ready to deposit that two hundred and fifty thousand to my account."

"I said I'd do it," J. Barnaby said angrily.

"Okay," Manning said cheerfully. "Issue a cancellation on the life insurance policy of Dzanku Dzanku and send the money over to my bank."

"What's the grounds for cancellation?"

"There's a clause in every policy," Manning said, "which permits you to cancel if the insured leaves this galaxy. Well, Dzanku just left on his way to Andromeda."

"Why?" asked the astonished J. Barnaby.

"Oh, decidedly not voluntarily," Man-

ning said, "but all quite legal. I got Dzanku out of jail by having him made my slave. When I was ready to leave, I merely sold him to a slave raider from Andromeda. Dzanku is on his way to serve in the Pleasure Camps. Since there is something about Andromedans which makes him shake all over, I imagine he'll be quite popular. I arranged to have the price paid for him deposited to his name on Rigel. I imagine Dzanku will want a nice long vacation when he finally gets back to this galaxy."

J. Barnaby stared out of the screen at Manning and then burst out laughing. "Dzanku in an Amdromedan Pleasure Camp," he said. "The thought of that is almost worth the quarter of a million you held me up for—you robber." Still chuckling, he cut the contact.

Manning Draco leaned back in his seat. He was going to take a good long nap while his ship headed for Terra. It would be the first time he'd been able to relax fully in two weeks. He expected to dream pleasantly of his fattened bank account and of the possibility of a date with Lhana Xano, the Martian receptionist—a date which he'd find some way of insuring against another interruption by J. Barnaby.

"That was really a very clever scheme, Mr. Draco," said a voice behind him.

Manning leaped out of his chair and whirled around. For a wild moment, he thought that Princess Aaledo had disguised herself and sneaked into his ship. Then he realized that it was Albert Sauri, the Terran crocodile who was an FBI agent. "What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Returning to Terra with you," Albert said. "I hope you don't mind too much. I would have asked you in advance, but you weren't too friendly the last time we met and I thought it might be better this way."

"Are you still hounding me?" Manning asked. "If you are, you're wasting your time. I'm not marrying the Princess."

"I know. Oh, that's all in the past, Mr. Draco. I hope there's no hard feeling. I was only doing my job."

"But what are you doing here?" Manning wanted to know. "What about your job on Pollux?"

"Oh, that," said Albert with a grimace. "Would you believe it, Mr. Draco—those dirty Polluxians have a species of rabbit which they trained as agents years ago and slipped into Terra. Nobody knows how many perfectly innocent looking rabbits in our midst are really spies for Pollux. Anyway, they knew all along that I was an FBI agent. And this morning a Polluxian guard came around and ordered me off the planet, and he sent word to my bureau that the next agent would just be thrown into prison. I fear the worst, Mr. Draco. You know what rabbits are like—there may be millions of Polluxian spies on Terra by this time."*

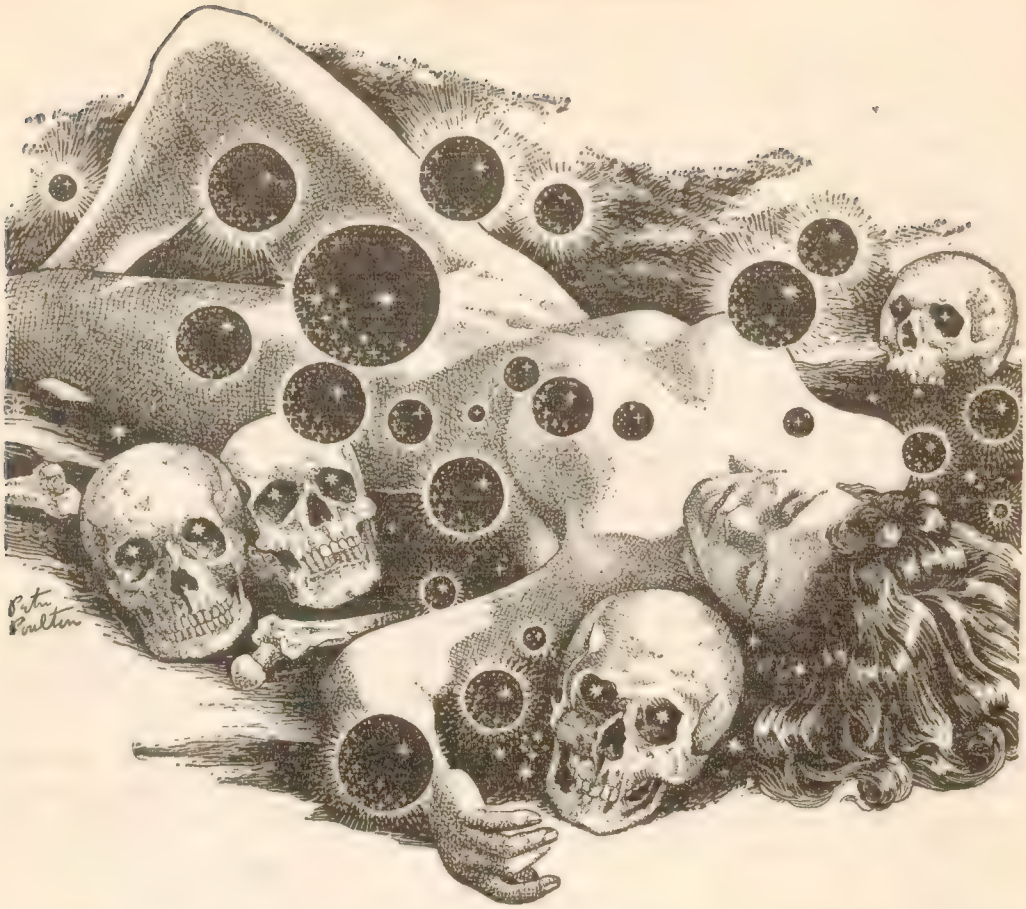
"I see," said Manning. "But what are you going to do now? I don't imagine there are any other planets where the dominant race is saurian, so it'll be difficult for you to continue as an undercover agent. What will you do?"

"That's no problem," said Albert. "As soon as I knew it was over, I got busy on the visiphone. I've already got a contract for my memoirs to be published, under the title of 'I was a Spy for the FBI'—catchy isn't it? Then I believe I've been booked for a series of lectures on the Polluxian menace. I was thinking of leading off with—"

"Don't practice your lecture on me," Manning said hastily. "I'm going to sleep." And he did.

*By now, of course, the Federation Bureau of Investigation has rounded up many of the Polluxian spies, but it is difficult to say how many of the remaining rabbits on Terra are honest rabbits and how many are spies. It's a trying situation.

Read ASYLUM EARTH, a novel by Bruce Elliott, and THE GUIDED MAN, a novelet by L. Sprague de Camp, in October STARTLING STORIES—25c at all stands!



Remembrance Of Things To Come

By WILLIAM RATIGAN

They stepped backward to go forward. . . .

WHEN we were kids, only a few of the skeletons remained in our corner of New Mexico. The majority had been carried away. Each Independence Day the grown-ups came from miles around to tug and tussle one of them onto as many as ten wagons lashed together to carry the load.

It's a long time ago, and we were kept at a distance, but I remember the peculiar blend of patriotic celebration and religious ritual. Psalms and hard cider ruled the day, climaxed by the halleluyah-hoorah when the teamsters cracked their bullwhips, the oxen strained at their yokes, and the wagon wheels creaked and rolled to the westward.

I still remember Great Grandfather in the black homespun of a Village El-

der, rooted in the center of the road, shaking a fist like a tree stump, his patriarchal beard bristling below fierce blue eyes. And, as the red dust rose behind the wagon wheels, so did his voice, until it crackled and drew a response from buckskin and calico alike. "Rust is the blood! Rust is the blood! Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord!"

My Father and Simon Black, their faces blank, always stood apart from the crowd, talking in whispers. I had the curious impression that they were reluctant to see the skeletons go.

Once, on a double-dare, three of our gang, rustling like mice through the wheat because it was forbidden to look closely at the monsters, crept almost to where we could touch the one in Caleb Shard's field. We saw nothing to alarm us—nothing really—but we never went there any more.

Maybe it was because so many grownups made the sign of the cross when they passed nearby and maybe it was because of conversations overheard when we were supposed to be asleep. We traded clues and spent wild guesses, as we did about the mysteries of sex, only without the snickers.

OUR log cabin had no windows, but a westering August sun slanted through the doorway and onto the table where Mother set the cake the day I blew out sixteen candles . . . and my boyhood. She gave me a kiss for love and a Bible for book learning. My Father's gift was a hunting knife, hammered into shape at his forge.

Great Grandfather climbed down from the loft with a man-sized bow. I tested the pull.

"You'll be bending it double and sending an arrow clean through a bison in another year," he said.

My Father, like most blacksmiths, had the reputation of being an easy-going, peaceful man. He startled us by growling: "If it weren't for fanatics like you, the world would have something better than an Indian weapon!"

Great Grandfather said things might be worse, if a certain element had contral. "For instance, I understand you helped Simon Black make another loom for his wife and daughters."

"What of it?" snapped my Father. "Hand looms are legal."

"There's a difference between the letter of the law and the spirit. Now just suppose. . . ."

"We don't need to suppose"—and my Father's brows were thunderclouds—"We know you sentenced your own son, my Father, to death!"

I heard Mother's apron-stifled gasp, saw pain blink Great Grandfather's eyes.

That was all I heard. They banished me outdoors and the storm of words faded as my bare toes dug into the warm dust on the river path.

My favorite spot was a grassy knoll where I could lean on my elbows and watch the water boil across the rocks. I forgot about grownup arguments and hugged a secret to my heart. It had to do with a time when I would harness the river as my Father harnessed horses, and put it to work so my mother could rest.

Oh, I had dreams! And there was more than the river in them. There was a blaze of the sun and the drive of the wind, and fantastic forces that wrought a pageant of miracles.

I don't know how long Great Grandfather had been there beside me. He could not have known what I was thinking, but he said: "You can't do it"—and his eyes were blue scars.

Somehow the grownup quarrel had been patched up because I was allowed to go West with him on the stagecoach that evening. My first trip—three days of hair-breadth lurches on curves and breakneck speed down canyons. Great Grandfather seemed in a joking mood. How I laughed when he spoke of once going the same distance in three hours.

The Grand Canyon was our stopping point. I had been told that all my questions would be answered there. We ar-

rived at the Red Mule Tavern late at night, hired cow ponies the next morning and rode to the rim. A pitiless sun searched the walls and chasms. I sucked in my breath.

BELOW, and stretching as far as eye could reach, were the skeletons, battalions and armies of them, forests and oceans—a graveyard of giants. I stood on an umbrella-rock, staring until my knees faltered.

"Rust is the blood," said Great Grandfather, sitting beside me. "Their bones won't bleach."

He began the story. It took all day because so many of his expressions had to be explained to me. It took all day, but I never grew hungry, never felt thirst.

"In what are now known as the Dark Ages," said Great Grandfather, "we did what you were dreaming about there at the river. We harnessed running water, we chained the lightning, captured the wind, commanded the universe to do our bidding. We thought we were the masters—we learned we were slaves. The machines robbed us of our jobs, our lives. They caused depressions, drove us to war."

Great Grandfather was in his late teens when the revolutionary movement started in a world smashed by wars and loss of religious faith. A descendant of Henry Ward Beecher thundered the keynote from his pulpit: "The machines, not the men, are the enemy. Thou shalt not worship false images. Moses shattered the Golden Calf. We stand at Armageddon and we battle for the Lord."

Outbreaks followed, girdling the globe. In New York, office employees dropped typewriters and comptometers from skyscrapers. Workers on a production line in Detroit went berserk. London housewives raided department stores with hammers.

"It grew into a crusade," said Great Grandfather. "National differences were forgotten as we battled the common enemy—the machines. We smashed the smaller ones. Larger sizes we killed by taking off their safety valves. There was always the slow death of no oil, no grease. You see, they had no hearts, no souls, and if we had not done away with them, we would have lost our minds. We *were* losing them, you know. We might have destroyed all life in our madness, but we got rid of the A-Bombs and H-Bombs right away. We knew we were safe then, we invited the other nations to bring their sacrifices to the Grand Canyon. It's a good place to make a pilgrimage. If a river takes a million years to carve a passage through rock, should man in his lifetime be allowed as much power and more?"

I looked out over the battlefield of rust and wondered. I pictured slaughtered hosts of mechanized dragons, and Towers of Babel, called cities, struck with a confusion of tongues. And I saw the ghosts of horseless carriages and winged chariots.

"It cost us," said Great Grandfather. "Millions of people were unable to survive without their machines. Some tried to rebuild them. Your own grandfather turned traitor. As an Elder I signed his death warrant."

I looked out over the graveyard of machines that dwarfed imagination. The rust *was* blood.

Great Grandfather's wounded eyes probed my face for the thoughts that dwelt underneath. "We went to extremes. We turned back time to sundials and candle notches. But there was no other way. You can see what would have happened if we hadn't done what we did?" His voice quavered. "You can see?"

And I could see. . . .

But I remembered how my Father and Simon Black had stood away from the crowd on Independence Day, and I knew I would stand with them from now on, and I thought we could make it work.

The rust could be removed. And the blood.

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The Reasonable People

By ROGER DEE

SELSOR, Spokesman for the Fifth Galactic Expedition in Search of Succor Against the Duurgs, hailed originally from the fifth planet of Antares. Selsor was forty-three hundred years old, and his stability of temper (for which all Antareans are proverbial) taken together with his vast fund of knowledge garnered during thirteen centuries of star roving and neatly

catalogued in the twin brains contained in his egg-shaped thorax, should have qualified him to deal with any conceivable situation.

As a matter of fact Selsor, though he failed consistently to find a race capable of assisting the Galactic Union in its long-term stand against the Duurgs, did a notable job as Spokesman until, searching the outer backwaters of the galaxy in a last forlorn hope, he came upon the third planet of a G-type sun named Sol and found it inhabited.

From that moment the situation ceased to be conceivable and became impossible.

DISCREET assessment of the natives by means of their communications channels established them as intelligent bipeds who called themselves Earthmen, a people short-lived and barbarous but fantastically ingenious in matters mechanical. A race exactly suited, in short —except for certain puzzling whimsicalities of ideology—to the needs of the Galactic Union.

There was no time to waste; Selsor wasted none. Educating and equipping so ephemeral a race to deal effectively with the invaders might require in the neighborhood of a thousand years, and the millenium involved came perilously close to the deadline beyond which the encroaching Duurgs would be too numerous to be checked.

Selsor appeared via tight-beam teleportation to the United Nations in assembly, accompanied by two of his staff: a tripedal Denebian with a double row of bright yellow eyes circling its cone-shaped head, and a winged red Sirian named Drplxx. He wasted no time on preliminaries, but laid his ambassadorial cards on the table with a succinct reasonableness calculated to win over on the spot any intelligent (and therefore logical) audience.

The result was like treading unwarily upon a nest of Algolian asps.

Pandemonium reigned, in twenty languages. Guards rushed in, brandishing weapons. Selsor and his companions departed, as they had come, via tight-beam teleportation.

On shipboard again, Selsor called an immediate council chosen from the staff of the Fifth Galactic Expedition in Search of Succor Against the Duurgs. The cause of his initial failure was pointed out almost at once by his second-in-command, a porcine Draconian named Feisul whose salient features were an apple-green hide and a magnificent set of sail-like ears.

"We acted too hastily," Feisul reasoned. "We should have made a closer study of these peculiar creatures and chosen a method of approach better suited to their local mores. Their basic reasonableness is beyond doubt, since they are intelligent, and intelligence and logic (as any fool knows) are synonymous; but it is entirely possible that their isolated state has conditioned them to a manner of thinking until now unknown to us."

"Possible," admitted Selsor, searching his mental files for a parallel and finding none. "In any event an intensive field study of these Earthmen is indicated, with emphasis laid upon the reactions of individual family groups. We *must* make these people understand the gravity of the situation, since they are our last hope of checking the Duurgs."

Feisul, having been first to put a prehensile hoof-digit upon the error, was chosen to head the mission. Two avian Altarians, sadly ruffled in the process of molding their feathers and in consequence reluctant to offend by their untidiness the sensibilities of their fellows in the Fifth Galactic Expedition in Search of Succor Against the Duurgs, were elected to accompany him.

THE RINGING of his doorbell caught David Litton at the height of a more than usually hectic Wednesday evening.

At eight-thirty Dave was planted before the typewriter in his second-floor den, sweating out an overdue gag rou-

tine for his sponsors, a soulless syndicate which promoted via Sunday-afternoon t-v a breakfast food highly touted as *Squelchie-Welchies; the Children's Choice.* The script was overdue because of a cataclysmic visit from Dave's in-laws, including the new twins; its progress now was not expedited by the din that drifted in from outside on the overwarm August breeze.

Under his window children roller-skated on the sidewalk, screaming shrilly. Across the street a pack of neighborhood dogs chased an unwary cat in ecstatic uproar, an undertaking discouraged at the tops of their voices by the owners of all involved. Dave's oscillating fan had developed a nerve-wearing squeak, his wife rattled dishes and sang happily in the kitchen downstairs, and Rickie, his eight-year-old son, had just been evicted for the fourth time from the study without having learned why the White Knight in his *Through The Looking-Glass* picture-book fell so persistently off his horse.

Disgustedly, Dave rolled the half-finished sheet of paper out of his machine and crumpled it. He rolled in another, and then sat appalled at the remorseless eight-and one-half-inch blankness that stared back at him.

He numbered the page and sat for a moment with his head in his hands, gathering his strained resources. One more interruption, and—

The bell rang.

"Oh, *hell!*" said Dave, and thought of suicide.

He chewed glumly at a frayed eraser while he waited for the inevitable babble of voices downstairs and wondered how much more he could take before he slipped his trolley completely. The script was much too near deadline to be put off again; if it were the Werners calling now. . . .

He heard Rickie answer the door. Someone said something in an odd, unfamiliar voice. Rickie's treble squeal floated up the stairway, shrilly delighted: "Daddy—come down and see!"

Dave frowned, trying to identify the voice. It hadn't sounded like anyone he knew. It sounded—it hadn't sounded like anyone at all.

It spoke again, and this time something in its queer lack of inflection set the hair to prickling on his neck. From the cellars of his memory a long-forgotten scrap of Poe drifted up chillingly: *They are neither man nor woman, they are neither brute nor human. . . .*

Dave kicked over his chair and took the steps three at a time. At the living room entrance he skidded to a halt and stared, stricken with a sudden icy conviction of insanity.

On his living room rug stood two five-foot birds with ragged lavender plumage and solemn, glassy yellow eyes. Between them, erect and bulging, teetered a hairless green pig with great drooping ears and a white metal box strapped about its belly.

"Aren't they super, Daddy?" Rickie crowed, capering ecstatically on one foot. "Two borogoves and a mome rath—isn't he the *momest* rath ever?"

"Ulp!" squeaked Dave, and fainted.

HE ROUSED again to a great feeling of relief that his seizure, whatever it had been, was over. Lord, if he'd ever dreamed that gag-writing could lead to this—

"What are raths and borogoves?" the toneless voice asked. "And why should one be mome and the other not?"

"It's right here in my picture-book," Rickie said eagerly. There was a sound of turning pages. "See, borogoves are big shabby birds with feathers sticking out all over like feather dusters. And raths are green pigs that go around outgribing, which is an awfully funny racket, and they're mome because they're a long way from home and lost. Are you a long way from home?"

"I am," the voice said. A moment later it said in the same featureless tone: "So are we."

Dave sat up and opened his eyes. The two lavender birds had their beaks in

Rickie's book, blinking solemnly. The green pig rustled its sail-like ears and regarded Dave thoughtfully. It did not blink.

"Do you always fall asleep so suddenly?" it asked. Irrelevantly, Dave saw the cause behind the tonal flatness of the voice; it came from the white metal box strapped to the monster's stomach, and it was common to all three. "Is it customary, or are you a departure from the norm?"

Three creatures out of myth and make-believe, Dave thought wildly, *with a thirst for information and one voice between them. Raths and toves and borogoves, and it's my turn to use the tooth, sister. . . .*

It struck him then for the first time that Rickie had seen the things first, which brought up two possibilities: he and Rickie were both crazy, which wasn't likely, either. The thought brought him to his feet in a hurry.

"Come away from there, Rickie," he ordered, and had to fight down a falsetto warble that crept into his voice. "Get back—those things may be dangerous!"

"I won't," Rickie said. "I like them, Daddy!"

The three monsters looked dolefully at one another.

"The offspring disobeys," their anonymous voice said. "Can defiance of authority be customary to the species, or is this one a—"

"He's a departure from the norm," Dave said, getting a grip on himself. "And I'd consider it a favor if you—uh, fellows would depart too. Rickie, are you coming?"

RICKIE shook his head obstinately. Dave moved toward him, and stopped hastily when Rickie ducked behind the nearest of the lavender birds.

The visitors exchanged another three-cornered look.

"The man hesitates," one of them—it was impossible to guess which—said. They blinked at Dave, and something like horror came into the toneless voice. "Is it possible that you are afraid, man? That you fear bodily harm from *us?*"

Dave circled warily, keeping an eye on Rickie.

"You're damned right I do," he said. "But if you lay a finger on the kid, I'll—Rickie, are you coming out of that, or must I call your mother?"

Rickie came out from behind the lavender bird, sniffling disconsolately.

The rattle of dishes in the kitchen ceased abruptly. Myra's voice called suspiciously: "What's going on in there, Dave Litton? Are you watching t-v again, when you should be working?"

Dave winced. "There's nothing wrong, darling," he called back. "Don't come in here!"

It was the wrong tack. Myra's heels clicked briskly in the hallway. At the living room entrance she clapped a hand to her mouth and froze, staring. Dave jumped forward just in time to catch her when she fainted.

"Now you've done it," he said bitterly, glaring at the three monsters across the room. "Why don't you—"

"Remarkable," the green one said. "The female also disobeys and falls asleep. Is this—"

"Oh, go to the devil," Dave said wearily.

Two highballs and twenty minutes later, Dave sat with Myra and Rickie on the couch and arrived at something like acceptance. Feisul, the porcine Draconian, relaxed his green bulk into Dave's favorite easy chair with a weird pig-man effect and fiddled with the little box strapped about his middle. The two avian Altarians, whose names turned out to be utterly unpronounceable, stood stork-like on one foot and blinked glassily.

"I should have guessed it," Dave said. "About your being a part of that Hallowe'en crew that popped in on the UN this afternoon. What I don't understand is why you should come to us for help, when you're so far ahead of us scientifically."

"Because your people alone in the

galaxy are peculiarly fitted to deal with the Duurgs," the pig-man said. "There is no other race possessing both intelligence and the faculty of organized aggression. Our Galactic cultures outgrew their early belligerence as they evolved to intelligence; your own, being in a rudimentary stage of development, retains roughly equal quantities of each."

Dave felt Myra relax beside him, and understood her relief. There was nothing to fear from these creatures, then. They were, by their own admission, harmless.

"I see," he said. "You've forgotten how to fight, and so you're forced to find a proxy to fight for you."

DAVE lit a cigarette and considered the possibilities, automatically casting for an angle that might stiffen his limping *Squelchies script.* "But why should we stick our necks out for you? What's in it for us?"

They looked at each other blankly.

"Because in another thousand years the Duurgs will have overrun the entire galaxy," Feisul said. "Including your own. By eliminating them now you may insure the eventual survival of your species."

"*A thousand years,*" Myra said, and began to laugh suddenly in a too-high key. "With atom bombs piling up higher every day and H-bombs in the making and the world crackling like a lighted fuse, and they ask us to—"

Dave patted her shoulder and gave her his handkerchief.

"No wonder the UN threw you out, if that's the story you gave them," he told Feisul. "A few thousand years ago our ancestors were chucking flint axes at each other. A thousand years from now our descendants, if there are any, will be doing the same. You won't find anybody here interested in a danger that far away, brother. It might as well be a million."

They communed among themselves, blinking solemnly.

"You will not destroy yourselves," Feisul said. "You will survive this initial stage of confusion because you are intelligent, and therefore—by irrefutable logic—reasonable."

Dave started a laugh, and broke it off when it began to sound like Myra's. "I've got news for you, brother, if that's the line your logic follows. Reasonable? Did you ever watch a woman buy a hat or pick a husband?"

When they blinked at him without comprehension he went on, warming to his subject.

"Think of this: we hire men to make laws and govern us, and then we bribe those same men not to enforce the laws they make. We spend billions of dollars to build hospitals, and maim each other by the thousands to fill them. Earth is already overcrowded, but nobody makes an effort to hold down the birth rate—we just promote more wars instead to take care of the surplus population. The only logic you'll find on Earth is the kind argued about by shaggy old idealists who wouldn't know how to open a can of beans for dinner.

"I thought this out carefully long ago, because I'm in the entertainment racket and have to know how people think in order to guess what they'll like to hear and see. The people who listen to my gags don't want instruction—they want to be amused. Logical? I'll quote you a sample of the sort of humor they go for, right out of my last week's *Squelchies* program. Just another shaggy-dog variation, but they loved it. . . .

"A real estate agent is stuck with a haunted house that won't stay leased. A family moves in today and out again tomorrow—it's happened so regularly that the agent knows exactly what the kick will be when the latest tenant swoops down on him for his refund.

"All night long, they say, they hear a noise overhead that sounds exactly like a fat man with a wooden leg, walking up and down on the roof. It goes on all night, regardless of the weather—*click-thud, click-thud,* until the whole family is scared green. Nobody, of

course, gets any sleep at all.

"Then a character named Hugo MacMurgatroyd moves into the house—and stays. The agent is first surprised, then worried; so worried that on the second day he calls Hugo on the phone to find out if he is all right. Hugo says he is okay, and so are his wife and children, and why the devil shouldn't they be?

" 'But didn't you hear anything last night?' asks the agent. 'Or the night before?'

" 'I did,' answers Hugo. 'I heard something that sounded like a fat man with a wooden leg, stumping around on my roof.'

" 'And what did you do about it?' asks the agent, beginning to get excited.

" 'I got a ladder,' says Hugo, 'and I climbed up on the roof to see what went on.'

" 'And what did you find?' demands the agent, who by now really *is* excited.

" 'An old man,' says Hugo MacMurgatroyd. 'A fat old man with a peg leg, stumping around on my roof.'

" 'But what did you do about it, for cat's sake?' yells the agent, thinking now that either he or Hugo is crazy. 'Didn't you chase him away, or call the police?'

" 'Not on your life,' says Hugo. 'The way I see it, an old man with a wooden leg wouldn't be walking around on my roof in the dark unless he had a damned good reason. If he didn't have a good reason, then he's nuts—and who wants to stand on a rooftop in the middle of the night and argue with a nut?' "

AND YOU regard this as amusing?" Feisul asked. "Is it typical of Earthian humor?"

"No," Dave said in a discouraged voice. "Most of it is worse."

"The situation as presented is improbable," Feisul said. "But your hypothetical tenant's logic is unimpeachable. It represents the only reasonable conclusion, that the wisest policy is to let well enough alone. "

Dave and Myra looked at each other blankly. "I want to see a Duurg," Rickie said loudly.

"You doubt the validity of his reasoning?" Feisul asked. "Consider carefully, putting aside all convictions to which your erratic manner of life has conditioned you. Could an even tenor of existence for all concerned be insured by any alternative other than Hugo MacMurgatroyd's acceptance of the fat man's presence? Can you suggest any other solution satisfactory to everyone, including the roof-walker?"

Dave rattled the ice left over from his last highball and thought it over.

"It *does* make sense when you put it like that," he said finally, and felt a reluctant dawning of respect. "The trouble is that we're not accustomed to considering the peg-leg's angle. Brother, if you could sell that line of thought to the rest of the world, we'd have Utopia!"

"I want to see a Duurg!" Rickie said insistently. "Or a bandersnatch. Do you know any bandersnatches, Mr. Feisul?"

The Draconian ran dexterous hoof-digits over his little box. "We came prepared to illustrate the situation thoroughly. Will you darken the room?"

When Dave cut the lights the little box put out a shaft of white light that seemed to solidify in midair. A cloudy, gently spinning disk appeared, expanding until points of brilliance emerged singly and in clusters from the glow.

"Our galaxy," Feisul said. "Your system is here, near the outer edge . . . the area infested by the Duurgs lies here, also close to the rim. Their encroachments are not yet considerable, but their numbers pyramid so swiftly that within another millenium they will have ravaged the entire galaxy."

Dave shivered in the darkness. Myra's hand crept into his, and in spite of its trembling he found the touch suddenly and infinitely reassuring.

Only Rickie was impatient. "I want to see a *Duurg!*" he howled.

Feisul twiddled at his box.

The star-whirl vanished, to be replaced by a quiet pastoral scene. The time was late afternoon, the indigo sky shimmered softly with a reflected glow of sunken, red-orange sun. The level meadow in the foreground rippled gently in the pre-dusk breeze.

"This eighth planet of Quothrab, a sun your astronomers have never seen," Feisul said, "is peopled by a race of quadrapedal philosophers who never conceived the need of machinery and who lack the combative instinct altogether. The Duurgs are only now arriving, from open space."

A cloud of tiny dots appeared against the red-orange sunset, slanting swiftly downward. Dave pictured a grim armada of space ships blasting toward the helpless planet, and felt a cold prickle of uneasiness when he tried to imagine what the invaders must look like—swarming tentacled monsters, bristling with inconceivably destructive weapons, a rapacious alien horde overrunning the peaceful little world and hunting down without mercy the terrified bands of four-footed philosophers.

"These are the Duurgs," Feisul said.

The approaching dots swooped above the meadow and settled gracefully in the near foreground.

"Great shades of H. G. and Orson," Dave breathed. "Are *these* the awful monsters you've been running from for thirteen centuries?"

THEY grazed placidly on the meadow, a scattered herd of sleek six-legged creatures that reminded Dave of nothing so much as winged and hornless gazelles—some spotted, some striped, some dappled, all shining with soft impossible hues. The sheer beauty of their pelts held his attention at first, delaying notice of such minor details as their great bovine eyes and triple-jointed legs and the round disk-shaped suckers that served them instead of hoofs.

"Why, they're lovely!" Myra said. "Dave, that *fur!* If I had a coat made of that—"

"Fur? Coat?" Dave echoed, startled. Inspiration spiraled through his head, picking up associations as it went, and staggered him like a bolt of lightning.

"I've got it!" he said. "Feisul, are the Duurgs particularly hard to kill?"

The Draconian flinched and turned a sickly chartreuse. The Altarian birds hid their heads under their wings and twittered piteously.

"*Must* you use that dreadful word?" Feisul protested faintly. "Its connotations of primordial bestiality. . . ."

Dave got up and put on the lights. The Altarians took their heads from under their wings and blinked at him reproachfully. The Draconian subsided again into Dave's easy chair and quivered fatly while his color returned.

"So that's the way of it," Dave said, taking over. "The Duurgs are only relatively dangerous, because your ultra-refined Galactic cultures make them so. They—how do they get from planet to planet without ships?"

"We know nothing of the principle behind their unique capacity for space travel," Feisul said, "though we assume it to be a natural function involving the warping of the etheric continuum. The Duurgs were sports from a planet-bound species in the beginning, but the mutation proved to be dominant; we are not certain of their interior organization, since none of our galactic cultures could bear to bring about the demise and dissection of one. But we do know this—they are not truly herbivorous. Once they exhaust the flora of a planet they will eat anything, including the fauna."

"And they multiply so fast that they reach the saturation point almost overnight," Dave said. "Then they move on to fresher pastures. And since your scruples prevent your wiping them out, they keep on spreading."

He grinned, remembering the varied and breath-catching beauty of those incredible pelts. "Well, I think you've brought your little problem to the right place, boys."

Myra stood up, her face taking on the special look she reserved for Dave's big moments. "Now look, Dave Litton—"

For once Dave refused to be quelled. "Remember that remark you made about a coat of Duurg fur? Frontiers have been opened and fortunes made out of skins that look like dust-rags compared to those Duurg pelts. Remember what happened to the buffalo?"

MYRA sat down again to digest the idea. Feisul's voice box made a baffled sound. "We do not understand. Our information does not include the reference just made."

Dave told them about the buffalo.

"Earthmen will go after these Duurgs," he said when they had partially recovered from their shock, "if they can be made to see it as a profitable venture. The real hitch is to sell them the idea of space travel first."

"We are ready to furnish the technical knowledge necessary for construction of vehicles," Feisul offered. "And to assist in any other way possible."

"Wrong tack," Dave disagreed. "It wouldn't work—remember what happened when you tried to proposition the UN? We've too suspicious a race to accept anything free, and too independent to be taken under anybody's wing without feeling inferior. We'll have to find another way, a way hard enough to make it attractive."

The lavender birds twittered at each other in Altarian. The Draconian blinked doubtfully.

"Being logicians," Feisul said, "it appears to us that if our purpose can not be accomplished by direct means, then a less apparent method must be adopted. Men are intelligent, and therefore logical. Ergo—"

"Got it!" Dave interrupted. "You're right—we're logical enough, but with reverse English. Not because we want to be, but because it's the way we're made, because we're the products of our environment. And that solves your problem."

[*Turn page*]

ALL EYES ARE ON

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THE DANGER IS REAL

CIVIL defense officials everywhere face a real handicap in our American talent for putting things off. We read that there is danger of war—but not before 1953, or 1954, or 1956. We sigh and relax. We know in our hearts that the danger is real. But we are content to wait until it is at our very doors before taking the first steps to protect ourselves.

Let's face it. So long as we need armed forces in a state of readiness, Main Street must be ready, too. We must get ready and stay ready for as long as the threat of aggression exists—five years, ten years, fifty years if need be.

The Kremlin never stops plotting to get what it wants. Some of us are still in the planning stage of the fight to keep what we hold most dear. The time to get busy is now. If an attack comes it can be met only by people who are trained and waiting, not by people who merely meant to be. What would you do if it happened tomorrow? You don't know? Then join your local civil defense organization today!

They caught the idea on first bounce, but it had to be explained to Myra.

"The average intelligence of a population decreases in exact proportion to its increase in numbers," he said. "Radio and t-v audiences proved that long ago. And at the same time, human attitudes and responses tend to become standardized along with the IQ drop until the reactions of a large enough body of people can be predicted as accurately as the reactions of an eight-year-old child. Look, if Rickie refused absolutely to eat his *Squelchies* for breakfast, how would you handle him?"

Myra laughed. "I see what you mean—but will it work?"

"You know the jerks who make up my public," Dave said. "It can't miss!"

AND it didn't.

"We are returning home at once," Selsor reported to the membership of the Fifth Galactic Expedition in Search of Succor Against the Duurgs. "The recommendations of our delegation have been followed to the letter. One of our auxiliary scouting ships has been left behind on Earth, apparently damaged and abandoned as useless. The inquisitive natives will promptly learn its principles of operation and duplicate it on a larger scale.

"With so intriguing a tool in their hands they will take to space within the next decade, throwing all their resources into the project as a result of the ultimatum we issued to them just before our departure. We shall undoubtedly suffer a certain amount of indignity at their hands when they stumble upon us in the future, but time and the civilizing influences of older cultures will temper their inherited aggressiveness. By that time the Duurgs will have been disposed of, and the galaxy will be safe."

Only one of the staff, an Algolian physicist whose interests lay solely in experimental abstracts and whose understanding of ideological subtleties was correspondingly dull, failed to perceive the philosophical fulcrum upon which their success hinged.

"Earthmen are essentially a logical people," Selsor explained patiently as the ship slipped into overdrive and flashed the Fifth Galactic Expedition in Search of Succor Against the Duurgs homeward again. "But the evolution of their peculiarly combative intelligence has resulted in a diametric inversion of their reasoning—an inversion which in this case necessitated a certain amount of indirection on our part to maneuver them into the line of action we desired. We simply forbade them, upon pain of annihilation, to leave their planet and take to space."

The Algolian physicist was doubtful. "I grasp the inversion," he said. "But will the device itself work?"

The Draconian second-in-command, who had picked up more during his association with Earthmen than an understanding of countrariwise logic, answered the question.

"You don't know these jerks, brother," Feisul said. "It can't miss!"

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THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

yet your eyes are continually drawn back to her. She is frozen motion, graceful, alive, poised so beautifully that you expect her to move at any moment. There is a luminosity about her too, which is compelling. What I am pointing out here is the improvement in the quality of the painting itself. If you compare with the covers of a few years ago, you will see how flat and two-dimensional they looked by contrast.

A couple of hardy souls have written in bemoaning the change. "You've ruined the mags," they groan. "Gone is the old distinctive style of lettering, gone, gone. . . ."

There are always the die-hards. But two out of several hundred is a pretty good average and good indication that the change is generally welcomed and liked. As solace to the die-hards, may I point out that there is no reason why the new lettering cannot be just as distinctive and characteristic as the old?

And speaking of letters, let's get to them.

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

JUST step into the ring, I'll hold the ropes apart for you. . . . There you are. . . . Gloves too tight? You look fine. . . . Just watch his left and keep moving around him all the time. . . . Got to be fast on your feet. . . . Keep moving. . . .

FUTURE CENSORED

by Joe Kinne
The Fool of Fulton

Dear Sam: Congratulations on the run of truly fine covers. Emsh's covers really tell a story. Of course, Bergey's do also, but the story is inevitably the same, beautiful femme and handsome hero menaced by improbable situation. But although this is the wrong mag, I do want to praise you on the June S. S. cover. It was magnificent! One of the two best covers I have ever had the cosmic pleasure to feast my eyes on. Take my advice, and don't give it away. If you sell it, you'll get enough credits to retire on.

"Captain Future" as far as I'm concerned, can go—(censored)—. But there seem to be those who enjoy such juvenile drivel. Considering that lamentable fact, I have an idea as to how you can satisfy their disgusting appetites. Put out a quarterly, or a semi-annual, or even an annual, devoted entirely to the cap, in the same style as the old "Captain Future Magazine." Those fans who like him will buy the stands out, while those who don't like him won't be inclined to put good ol' S. S. or T. W. S. back on the rack after sadly gazing at the contents page. Good? Naturally. What do you expect from a genius?

Being extremely interested in explosives, I read Edward Seibel's letter with curiosity. In fact, I am now being the object of an un-traceable rumor that I have a gallon of nitroglycerine hidden away in my laboratory. And it's a dirty lie! If I find the joker who started it, I'll drop the whole two gallons on him!

Back to the subject. If Ed has made up with the perpetrator of that most dastardly deed, I would like to find out what the explosive was. So far I've only succeeded in getting a few shards of glass imbedded in my laboratory wall. Heck, that's amateur stuff. I want to blow the whole damn wall out!! (When you print this, please leave in the second exclamation point, it makes it more emphatic.) . . .! I resent the implication that that's a hint!!

Another bit of praise: (It is obvious from the volume of praise that I haven't read the stories yet.) Your letter columns are the best in the business. They don't contain monotonous story ratings as many of your competitors do and they aren't completely occupied with the atomic weight of Schomomonium 246. Everything you print is a discussion; useful information, constructive criticism and the like. As long as your present policies keep up, you can count on at least one steady customer, yours truly.

One more item. I would be very obliged if you would print this, as I am in a hurry to get rolling. When I attended the Bufflacon in May, I gave my name and address to a member of the ETRO, Extra-Terrestrial Research Organization, and he promised to send me some information on joining the club as soon as he got home. He must have taken the scenic route by way of Alpha Centauri, because I haven't heard from him since. If he reads this, I would like to have him get in touch with me. In the meantime, I will be out Alpha Centauri way searching for him. And please hurry, it's cold out there!—*255 South 6th St., Fulton, N. Y.*

Shucks, Joe, why didn't you tell us? That extra-terrestrial showed up here, looking for you, said he'd lost your address. We thought he looked like a bill collector and sent him out to Brooklyn. He'll never find his way back and you're out there waiting—gee, Joe, we didn't mean it, honest!

STIR-UP CUP

by John Woehler

Dear Sam: Just finished the Aug. issue of TWS. I didn't think any of the stories were too exciting, but I enjoyed the letters. Tell, me, (damn that typewriter) what has the cover got to do with the story? It is very fine cover; I like the young lady and I like the background. But what story is it from? Oh well, nothing important.

Now for the experience. I am a student in the

creative writing department here at Stanford, or hope to be if my grades come out better than I expect. In one of my courses one of the texts required is a collection of short stories entitled *Stories for Here and Now.* There are many fine authors represented. Among the stories is *The Highway* by Ray Bradbury. I can remember when he wrote for some very familiar pulp mags. It did my heart good to see his story in a collection that included some of the finest short story authors of our day. This because I consider him one of the finest writers of ye day. And a lot of people call us stf people hack writers!

I agree with Marian Cox as to her argument supporting males in cover art. Why not strip the man down as well as the woman, or is the artist taking this woman-better-adapted-to-space routine to heart? You know these poor, frustrated femmes (heh, heh, that ought to stir something up!)

You might be interested to know that I haven't found more than three people on the campus who read stf. I realize that this is an uncivilized portion of the country, but I hoped to find a few more fen here in NORTHERN California. Of course, there are probably many people who read the stuff that we're supposed to study. I am looking forward to a long summer reading and traveling. You might be surprised to see me drop in some afternoon with about thirty new manuscripts for you to sweat over. It might be worth it just to see the expression on your face.

I shall now close with the following volleys:

Drop Dead, Don Foster . . . all editors and writers hate guys who look up little errors and make a fuss over them.

Hello Pat Elewis . . . You sound interesting . . . and you can count! even though I can't spell.

Doc Carpenter . . . Take a shot of your own novocaine when you read TWS. I agree with Sam. Poetic license, where is thy sting.

Bill St. John . . . Brief fellow, aren't you? Hi Grady! (Always anxious to make new friends.

Virginia Winchester . . . I agree; is it really that cold up there, Sam?

Fie on You, V. B. Williams! . . . You can always read scientific journals, you know.

May Jove miglug you, Pat M. Paul Kelly (long name m'gawd!) What's wrong with paganism? In theory, anyway, anyone's entitled to believe or print what he pleases.

I could use you in my lit courses, Seibel. What a memory!

Religion and Politics are two hoops that go round and round with ne'er a stop between. Therefore, no comment on that religious deal.

That Sarge is quite a boy. Why is he only a Sarge? I agree wholeheartedly. And booze comes near to the top with me, too.

Well, I have to pour myself some dinner.—*718 Manzanita, Sierra Madre, Cal.*

Near to the top, did you say? Some of it ran over. And before dinner too! Tsk. So you and Virginia Winchester want the men to come out of the mummy wrappings, do you? The idea is not without logic and merit. Will see what can be done. Meantime, just warn me when you expect to show up with those thutty manuscripts. I got a vacation coming.

NOT REALLY A COMPLAINT

by Jack Gatto

Dear Meany Mines: Fandom demands a retraction! What do you mean "shorten the letters!" I say SHORTEN THE STORIES!! Or better yet, put all the stories in STARTLING and save TWS for letters exclusively. Remember that old Burmese proverb: The enjoyment of a S. F. mag is directly proportional to the square of the length of the letters times pi.

Aside to Henry Moskowitz: If Sam resurrects Capt. Future I will personally—no, maybe I won't. They hang people for that. But I'll hire someone! Here is one vote against Future Forever!

Congrats and roses to you, Sam. Your duo really rates tops. Sams I and II have brought the babes a long way and I'm betting digest size lies just around that next clump of trees. Even the editorials are readable. (Shades of JWC!)

A few bones to pick though:

1. COUNTERFEIT. Did this remind you of "Who Goes There?" This is one counterfeit easy to detect.
2. BLURBS. I read a story once in which blurbs had taken the place of the stories. You're not far from it.
3. AUTHORS. This isn't really a complaint. I'd just like to know why Jack Vance, Kendell Foster Crossen and Fletcher Pratt devote their energies solely to SS and TWS. Relations, maybe?

If any of your happy readers want to unload anything, here is the address they are looking for—*42 Oakland Ave., Uniontown, Pa.*

Okay, so we'll leave all the stories out of the next issue of TWS and just run letters. But without stories, what'll you write about? The stories in SS? Then we'll have to run those letters in SS. And your next issue of TWS will consist entirely of blank pages. Even with paper costing what it does, that would be a little high for a notebook with a Schomburg cover, no?

Digest size? See arguments in editorial. Or ignore them if you like. Who expects editorials to be readable anyway?

COUNTERFEIT. Of course this is a familiar idea, as noted in blurb on page 52. That doesn't mean a new slant doesn't rate a new story. Wasn't Heinlein's PUPPET MASTERS the same idea as Millard's THE GODS HATE KANSAS? (See November issue of FANTASTIC STORY MAGAZINE.)

BLURBS: If we didn't explain the story to you, you dope, how would you understand it? Okay, so you're smart—skip them. They dress up the page a little, don't they?

AUTHORS: Can only tell you what they've told me—that they prefer to write

for SS and TWS because there are no taboos, no preconceived ideas of what should go into an acceptable story, no limitations as to theme or style or approach, no attempt to hammer stories into a formula. They feel free to experiment with new ideas and new modes of expression. I'm glad to see it because I think out of this comes progress. And you will note that—just to pick two, Vance and Crossen—there has been a change, a growth in their writing just in the past year.

Is there a soap box handy? Okay, here we go. SS and TWS are wide open to new stories by new authors. There are no restrictions. If a story violates good taste or decency we reserve the right to reject it. But if it is merely provocative or controversial we have yet to back away from it. We are right now in a critical period for science fiction—a period in which it must either go ahead and become literature, or stand still and congeal into the fringe area of interesting, but hardly-to-be-taken-seriously reading for a limited fandom. Thank you.

ABSOLUTE PITCH

by Wallace Parsons

Dear Sam: May I be personal? I think I like you. You're doing such a good job that I thought I should write. I started reading stf about September, with FSM. I liked it so much that now I always read TWS and SS, as well as FSM. Don't let me down, keep up the same high standards you have now.

Will you please print some more Crossen? Also I'd like to read something about Jack Williamson's HUMANOIDS. Also more Heinlein. Forget Bradbury. Him I can't stand; should be in fantasy. Like OUR INHABITED UNIVERSE. Have been going crazy trying to prove him wrong—can't do it.

Set up la guillotine for the letters. More fun, broken noses, smashed skulls than any other mag has. But I'm fuming; Gerald Stevens done made a boo-boo. Who says no one could pick up a musical note as quickly as Benny did? As a pianist of lo-o-ng experience, and a singer, I can confidently say that Mr. Sheldon did not exaggerate. Consider: famous composers could work out intricate melodies and harmonies mentally and set them down on paper without the aid of a musical instrument. Beethoven continued to compose while stone deaf. Also, hear some modern microtonalism. That type of ear which Benny possessed would be necessary to write such music. I think before Mr. Steward shoots off his mouth he had better understand what he's saying instead of relying on his own deranged (good, hah?) judgement.

Say, is a Mr. A. E. Hitch listening? Good. A leetle teeny error in your letter. You say that "anaerobic bacteria grow best in absence of oxygen." Unh, unh. Any high school botany book will tell you that in photosynthesis plants take in carbon dioxide and give off oxygen, but in respiration they expel carbon dioxide and take in oxygen. You will also find that bacteria are plants —the animal farm is protozoa, which also indulges in respiration.

Also, 85 degrees C is 185 F, not 180 F. This may seem hair splitting, but I think it is important.

Back to Gerald Steward again. I didn't notice he was another Torontonian. He seemed so anxious that Harlan Ellison should have had an illo that I may have good news for him. But this is primarily for John Gatto and others who want the cover illustrations. Being an amateur photographer myself, I have an idea, incomplete as it is, to reproduce those covers, minus the lettering. I don't intend to make these reproductions myself, let alone distribute them and I lack the equipment and time for research. But if any amateur photogs read this and have any ideas, have them send any suggestions to me. I will not try to make actual reproductions, but I often do a pretty good job of working out techniques on paper from available information. Anybody interested.

I'd better go, just bought a competitor's mag—er—rag and I'd better read it. (Yuk, yuk.)—*73 Sprucehill Rd., Toronto 8, Ont.*

P.S. What is the best address for these letters?

P.P.S. What is a BEM?

P.P.P.S. Don't fret over the competitor; your mag is better.

Don't want to throw any cold water, but remember, pliz, that reproduction of covers and things for commercial purposes, like resale and so on, bumps our copyright. For your own personal fun or amazement, that's all right. We would be annoyed however, if someone made up a photographic or other reproduction of a lot of our covers and peddled them. So keep that in mind, if you will.

In your controversy with Hitch, I think I'm slightly on his side. Did some research into soil bacteria last summer and found that anaerobic bacteria definitely thrive in the absence of oxygen. So does Clostridium botulinum, which reproduces happily in airless and air-tight cans of food to the consternation of unwary nibblers.

Best address for this letter is exactly the one you used: 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.

A BEM is a Bug-Eyed-Monster, generally applied to any non-human, especially non-terrestrial type of animal life.

More Crossen is on the way. In addition to POLLUXIAN PRETENDER in this ish, the future holds GET ALONG LITTLE UNICORN, MY OLD VENUSIAN HOME and a new Manning Draco, THE CAPHIAN CAPER. SS has one too, a novelette titled LOVE THAT AIR.

You hooked now?

OOPSLA
by Gregg Calkins

Dear Sam: I guess I should say something about the format change. Really not too different, you know, but enough. The layout of the title is nice, and your recent practice of keeping the story titles off of the cover painting is admirable. (Not at all to mention the nice cover Emsh did this issue.)

Your editorial seemed a bit lop-sided. Poor Sam. I feel for you, just the same. If we don't enthuse over the stories you enthuse over, we're sorry, and this business of apathy—well, we're sorry about that, too. True, some editors get no praise, and some get it all. However, those that don't get anything but acceptance really have it rugged. Apathy, I think you said. Why is it when an editor really thinks he has a story and expects enthusiasm over it, all he gets is apathy? Well, look at it from the reader's standpoint. There are about a dozen readable stf mags in the field today. Of these, the fen (those people who write in to you) have to wade through about 90% crud. By the time we come to a really good story, only a few have the strength to raise a feeble cheer for it. As you might say, we are rather scarred and calloused to it all.

But not too calloused to gripe! Listen, Sam, I'm mad at you. Why? Because LORDS OF THE MORNING was one of the best stories to ever hit TWS, and you cut it down to 35 pages and then have the gall to call it a novel. Oh, I don't mean you actually blue-pencilled it, but you sure didn't try very hard to make Hamilton write a decent story, as far as length goes. Whatever will the book publisher of the future do for re-print material when he can no longer find book-length novels being written, but only puny 35 page long short stories. The whole field of *novel* writing is going to hell! There isn't a decent author around anymore who will write a story longer than 35,000 words, and he then calls that a "book-length novel." And, Sam, when you *do* get a good novel like "DRAGON'S ISLAND" in SS, you cut it so bad it practically bleeds to death. Phooey! I'm mad at you.

What happened this issue? You really clobbered this ish! Out of the single novel (?) you make it so short as to almost spoil it (only the extremely competent illustrations by Schomburg save it) and of the two novelettes, Vance is shallow and unreadable. The short stories you usually sling together like low-grade hash house, so I'm not too surprised at their general unreadability, with the sparkling exception of Murray Leinster, no credit to you. You disappoint me, Sam. How can I go around telling everybody Sam Mines is my favorite editor when you pull tricks like this behind my back?

Here's how that August issue should have looked: Novel, 65 pages at least, tho 75 would have been better. You could have done it by dropping "CHOLWELL'S CHICKENS" and two shorts (HALLUCINATION and SORT OF LIKE A FLOWER) and giving "LORDS OF THE MORNING" their space. Then the one novelet, "COUNTERFEIT," and the two shorts bringing up the end. Total for the issue: one long novel, one novelet, two short stories, four features.

Look, Sam, let's be fair about this. Take a poll. Do the readers want short novels like now, and lots of short stories in the issue, or a good long novel, and only one novelet and one or two short stories? Ask 'em.

As for the features, you're still fair in that category, tho Bix is rapidly arousing my ire. . . . For TRS—no, no, don't cut the letters, and don't print the short ones. So what if some people *are* left out, Sam? So what? You can leave me out, if you like. But, let's leave the good (and usually the long, by the same virtue) letters whole and unmutilated, except on your judgement. I *still* trust you, Sam, tho I'm beginning to wonder why. . . .

I wonder if I should send you flowers, Sam, to help heal the wound that insult on page 127 left. I didn't know people could be so cruel. I mean that creature called St. John. "You almost made it to the top where OW, MADGE, and AS is" he says. Ugh! If you ever make it to the "top" where those mags are, Sam, I'll desert you cold! Ghu! St. John picks out the three worst mags in the field, and then says TWS is almost in the same category as they are. You should challenge the offender to a duel, Sam.

Who in Ghu started this fracas rambling through the pages of TRS on the theological questions? I can't figure out what place it has here, at all, I can't. Now, look, Sam. I don't mind feuds—not one bit. They let off steam, clear the air, and generally get something answered or solved, tho admittedly in a rather hap-hazard way. But, let's keep them to some degree of sanity and/or interestingness, anyhow.

Enough of these ramblings, Sam. I'll leave you with a fond snarl, this time, and another one for Bixl, cowering over in that corner. I'm warning you fellows, you haven't got much time left. Chicago is getting closer and closer, you know, and I'll be there too. You guys wanna get murdered in your sleep? No, well Sam, then suppose you print a creditable novel as far as length goes, and Bixl, suppose you review a fanzine or two in that so-called commentary on fandom of yours, and stop sitting around. Not that I'm complaining about Merril this time—she was very fine. On her words, I will hereby accept pro's as people, and may even stoop so low as to talk to one or two at the convention. But I don't know about editors.—*761 Oakley St., Salt Lake City 16, Utah.*

Look, stop trying to confuse everybody. Here we've got it nicely worked out, with SS carrying the long novel, novelet and shorts and with TWS taking two short novels, novelet and shorts—a nice balance, and you're howling to tear it all up and make them both the same. Foidermore, nobody told Ed Hamilton to cut, or to hold LORDS OF THE MORNING down to size. It came in that way, unheralded and unsung, we liked it and bought it on sight, just as it was. No editor would think of padding it when it was so crisp and well told a story. Trouble is you liked it so well you just didn't want it to stop. As for DRAGON'S ISLAND, what'd you want us to do—print just DRAGON'S ISLAND and nothing else? Greg,

old boy, you've got to tell yourself we know how to cut these long jobs without ruining them—well, try!

You almost had me convinced you were a man of rare tastes and appreciation, then you haul off and produce words about CHOLWELL'S CHICKENS which cause me grave disappointment in you. Gregg, haven't you been overworking a bit on OOPSLA? And in this heat too. . . . Ah, well, there's a new Hamilton to keep you happy. And a dilly too.

PHILADELPHIA LAWYER

by Dave Hammond

Dear Sam Mines: I have never, no never, read a letter column like the one in the latest (Aug. '52) issue of TWS. What a mess! What endless, blathering variety; what pathos, what tragedy, what laughter, what—yes, what? Even if the rest of the magazine had been blank pages it would have been worth the cover charge.

The only story I've had time to read was Alan E. Nourse's COUNTERFEIT. It was a good story. Even though Alan's a personal friend of mine I won't call it a resounding classic, but I liked it a lot. But I still don't get this spaceship that *clangs* through space. I imagine it would be pretty unnerving!

Let me see what I can add to the general confusion of the reader's pages.

First, Captain Future: according to certain members of the PSFS (Philadelphia Science Fiction Society) they had a lot to do with the demise of Cap Future from those novelet lengths in STARTLING. It seems they were in Hamilton's presence in some fashion or other and read the last of Future yarns. They asked him why he wanted to write them. Ed is reported to have answered "Well, Merwin wants to buy them." They gave him a long harangue in which an answer to Ed's statement above was "(censored) Merwin!" (although this was an obvious biological impossibility). They even got Ed to re-work that last story so it would come to a sort of conclusion of the series. The reason I say "according to" and "it seems" is because my informant, while reliable enough, was considerably "under the influence" at the time.

In case you're wondering what the PSFS is and who the people in it are I'll say that three members have their names in the August issue. Alan Nourse is a member; so is L. Sprague de Camp; and, likewise, me. But we ain't all—they's about thirty or forty others!

I enjoyed that letter by V. B. Williams in which he, in an absolute masterpiece of derogatory writing, really rakes me across the coals. I got a few laughs out of it and, first chance I get, I'll drop him a note of appreciation. He did a fine job. But no better a job than did ye editor rallying to my defense.

One recommendation: tune out Tuning!

I see there's plenty of religion being tossed around through the readers' pages. Let's see if I can't get someone else to condemn me completely as Williams did.

Here's something I found out by slow deliberation. The main question in religion is life after death; just what you get in that "life after death" is pretty vague although there are hosts of heavenly angels, supposedly, and, if you're an Arab, there are satin-skinned houris and plenty of milk and honey, and lots of other possibilities, from the ancient Babylonian crawling swamp of darkness, to the Northern races' dreams of bright Valhalla, but none of it is very deep. Most of it is concerned with all you have to go through on earth to get there—and not if it's all worth the effort. So let's take it this way:

When you die, two things can happen: (1) You can stay dead, or (2) There is life again.

If it's number 1, it really doesn't matter anymore and all the this-and-that ritual, et all, seems pretty ridiculous, but if it's number 2 it still doesn't look so intelligent. Life after death divides into two categories. First, the finished plan:

Purpose. Everything has a purpose and place. Isn't that implicit in every work of God? Doesn't God have a purpose? Admit that and you're trapped in my scheme. A purpose can be realized or it can not be. Suppose that the ultimate purpose is perfection in everything. OK, life after death proceeds, things change with these spirit entities, these dwellers in other planes, these travelers along the pathway to perfection; eventually, there will be "perfection"—isn't that true?—Why would God have a purpose unless it was something that could be completed?—and with "perfection" everything ends. You can't improve on perfection. So there you have it, done, finished, and ended. It now goes into the museum of the Gods to be looked at and admired by the other Gods. Does that appeal to you? It is only a slight extenuation—"Death," which can be defined as lack of purpose, comes anyway.

Or, take the other extreme. There is no purpose, or, if there is, there is one that can never be realized. What happens? Onward and onward through time and space wanders the soul doing nothing but (perhaps) practicing hedonism or searching endlessly for a solution that can not be attained.

And don't look for any combinations of these two alternatives. Either there is a purpose or there isn't. If there isn't, the whole cosmos has no meaning and it's all emptiness. If there *is* a purpose then it can be achieved or it can not. If it can not, then it is senseless. If it can, then it all ends, just as though it had never been.

So that's the way I see religion and reality.

If anyone can take me to task and show me what's wrong with my ideas and thoughts then, believe me, I would be eternally grateful.

But enough of such subjects, I just want to see if I can get any kind of reaction from anyone.

The biggest laugh I got from the letter section was from a letter by Bill St. John. Remember? He likes TWS and he says: "You almost made it to the top where OW, MADGE, and AS is." I collapsed to the floor, started rolling around, roaring with laughter, screaming, shouting, and generally enjoying the whole process. I wonder, Mines, if you want to get to that "top"!—*Box 89, Runnemede, N. J.*

Dave, if you start that religious battle all

over again I'll fix your wagon—I'll mail Bixby to you.

In fact, FOOL'S ERRAND, in this ish, is our topper to the whole affair. One of the nicest yarns we've seen in a long time, and proving nothing—just like all such rhubarbs.

Your story about Cap Future, Ed Hamilton and the PSFS reads well but sounds apocryphal to me, I hae me doots about it. Merwin always thought Future was juvenile and then the paper pinch came along and when it came to a question of what had to be cut back, the Cap was public candidate number one, thass all. Ask Ed Hamilton, why don't you?

Glad you liked the August colyumn. Pathos, the man says. And here we're trying strictly for laughs. That *is* pathetic.

COLLECTOR'S ITEM
by R. Jewitt

Dear Sir: Recently a S. F. collector sent me a list of TWS he had for sale. The list, nearly complete, contained issues from 1930 up to 1952. There are three of these issues I have been trying to get for years with no success and wonder if you can help me. I would be able to get them from the above collector if I knew the correct number; unfortunately I don't and that is why I need your help.

Before the war you published—in a three part serial—a novel by Richard Vaughn, EXILE OF THE SKIES. I am not sure of the year or month of any of the three issues—could you please let me know and whether this serial was ever published as a complete novel (book form.)—*62 Essex Street, Gipsyville, Hull, Yorkshire, England.*

We have already written to tell Mr. Jewitt that EXILE OF THE SKIES was published in WONDER STORIES in January, February and March, 1934. But off-hand we do not know if anyone made a hard cover book out of it. If any of you ever saw it—Mr. Jewitt is palpitating for the information.

AD-VANCE GUARD
by Arthur J. Cox

Dear Mr. Mines: Just a note inspired by my admiration for *Cholwell's Chickens* by Jack Vance. I liked it very much. It offers fresh evidence for my contention that Jack Vance is the finest writer in the science fiction field. You can be proud of the fact that you're his chief publisher.—*628 South Bixel Street, Los Angeles 17, Calif.*

I don't have to tell you to get together with Jack Gatto and Gregg Calkins—the challenges to duel have probably already gone out by air mail. Personally we thought CHOLWELL'S CHICKENS was pretty good fun ourselves. And we thought a certain small item by Vance titled NOISE was a beautiful job; moreover indicated a substantial growth in his stature as a writer. So sue us.

LUNCHEON MEAT
by Wm. F. Hall

Dear Spam, (Did I get your goat??)—I *like* your magazine! I read every bit of stf I can lay my grubby little pseudopods on, save AS and FA, and I've come to a definite conclusion: I want to read science-FICTION. So far as I can see, you read fiction for enjoyment, escape; *not* escape velocities. Agreed?

Since this letter may not reach you in time, I'll just say that Hamilton was at his best, and so were you.

I've been reading science-fiction for a number of years, and I've watched these religious battles crop up before; but *this* time, I'd like to say something about it. 1) The only atheists I know seem to operate on the assumption that, since we cannot *prove* the existence of God, he does not exist. Yet can *they* prove their own theories to be right? 2) A man believes as he is influenced to believe because, as I have just said, the validity, or truth of such cannot be proven. So why the argument?

Y'know, Galaxy used a cute advertising trick which seems to have gone over perfectly. They simply *told* the people they were the best, put out a few good issues, and by George and Marc Pillsworth if the fans didn't fall for it! Not that Galaxy isn't a first-rate s-f mag, because it couldn't fail to be, with Gold as editor. But did you ever see such a slick way of reaching the top in a single blow?

Sam, old boy, take a chair . . . I'm going to send you soon (stop turning blue!) a story of mine. Since it is my first effort, I don't have much hope of it getting published, but would, *could* you tell me if I have any ability? My friends seem to like my stuff, but then none of their heads come to a blue pencil point. . . .

Oh, yes. Anybody wanna write me?—*3820 Purdue, Dallas, Tex.*

That blue color is very becoming, don't you think?

PHILOSOPHY TOO
by Marion Mallinger

Dear Mr. Mines: The letter department of your magazine is good. I may go so far as to say as good as some of the stories. Instead of finding the stories rehashed, I find good, interesting letters that are worth reading. This is a good drawing card to people who have only now started reading S.F. If they find letters that talk about previous stories (this was good, that was bad) they lose interest and skip the section. Here maybe someone who would have turned into an active fan is lost. But in writing letters to the editor that actually discuss interesting questions a lot of people get pleasantly excited, talk about it and so spread the growth of S.F. a little faster.

In the August issue I became fascinated by one letter in particular, the one written by Ernest and Bertha Sundet. For some reason they state: "Only a Christian knows for sure he is going to be all right after death." This is a surprisingly stuffy attitude for a reader of S.F. to take. What about all the other organized religions in the world? Surely the Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, Hebrews and others non-Christian sects, which far outnumber the Christians, must believe that if they have led a good life on earth they will go to a heaven when they die. Maybe in imagination it won't be the same version of heaven as the Sundets', but nevertheless it will be heaven. To deny this statement would be the same as calling everyone else pagans. Jesus Christ couldn't even go there because he was Jewish. The same goes for the men in both the Old and New Testaments.

If we look back in history we find this attitude frequently, that if you weren't a Christian you weren't fit to live. So in the name of the Man who gave up His life to suffer for our sins, our ancestors went out and committed as much senseless murdering, pillaging and destroying as Adolf Hitler did. The motives were different, but the results the same. The Crusaders cried: "For the Holy Grail and Our Lord!" The Spanish Conquistadors yelled: "For God, Country and King!" and Hitler screamed: "Deutchland Uber Alles!"

In science fiction we're suppose to be looking forward. When men reach the planets it will be for empire. Religion usually follows close on empire's trail. It's not hard to visualize a rocket ship settling down on an earth-type planet and the captain, all decked out in dress uniform, with a flag in one hand and a Bible clasped in the other, saying: "In the name of the United Nations and God, I claim this planet." Around this theme could be built a darn good story, if it weren't so hot to handle. If such a situation ever does come about, almost anything might happen. History might repeat itself on a larger scale but what would happen if the humanoid (naturally) people of this distant world were technically as advanced as Earth and were unwilling to be forced to accept a new ideaology? Cute idea, no?

Human nature being what it is, no one person's opinions will coincide with everyone else's, but we still have both the right and the privilege of stating what we believe. Who in this world has the right or complete knowledge to say we are wrong? It is never wrong to disagree, just as long as you or I don't try to stuff an idea down somebody else's throat when they don't want it.

I've really sounded off here, but I've tried to make an intelligent argument instead of some witty-snide comments. Hope I made my point.—*734 Mellon Street, Pittsburgh 6, Pa.*

If your point was that no individual or group can claim a monopoly on truth or wisdom, you've made a good stab at it. We think so too, and are willing to listen to 'em all. Cuts into our sleep something terrible.

ASK A FOOLISH QUESTION
by Wilkie Connor

Dear Sam: Re your editorial in Aug., 1952, issue of TWS: "What kind of stories do YOU like?" Well, if you mean ME, I like: 1. Humourous yarns. 2. Space Opera. 3. Straight fantasy. (Not to mention stories with gals in 'em.) Now, Sam: What kinds of stories do YOU like?

Your dressed-up cover really did wonders for WONDER.

LORDS OF MORNING was the best Hamilton in long time.

You want 'em short. This o.k.?—*1514 Poston Circle, Gastonia, N.C.*

Yeh, this is fine. What kinds of stories do I like? That's easy. I like 1. Humorous yarns. 2. Space Opera. 3. Straight fantasy. (Not to mention stories with gals in 'em.) I also like time travel stories, satires, stories in which the hero solves a baffling puzzle, stories of (oops) social significance, stories of super-duper gadgets—fact I like almost any kind of story that is good, meaning good.

ONCE OVER HEAVILY
by Jim Harmon

Merry Memorial Day, Sam: An also-ran in the August WONDER'S *Reader Speaks,* eh? The story of my young life. Of course, I realize *some* editors don't want intelligent letters after some experiments with Palmer and Browne and others, but *you* Sam? And here I told Horace Gold that he should have a more personal touch like Samuel Mines. Speaking of your personal touches, when am I going to get that five back? Well, he said he was Mines, although now that I've seen your pictures, I think it must have been Bixby.

It was one of my better letters, too—I was inspired—writing for posterity and immortality. It wasn't exactly theological—more philosophic or psychological. I analyzed the instinct within Man that makes him either desire or create religion (take your choice). In religion, the chief god is also always the Father (or Master) and the Creator. Man obviously is afraid to be self-reliant; he wants a protecting (and avenging) Master to turn to when he no longer has faith in his own efforts. He wants to know where his race came from so he can be secure in the future of it, so he wants the explanation—or rationalization—of the supernatural or paranormal creative agency. The Heaven and Hell symbols are fairly constant, too. Hell as a punishment for people who have more fun than you; Heaven as a reward to you for the things you missed out on in life because of religion; both to fulfill the wishful hope for eternal life because of a fear of death so strong that you can't accept the reality of it. Did you get this far, Sam? That's all I am going to say. I think it is at least as worthwhile as some of the non-theological name-calling sessions you published, but I suppose you have to have a little variety as a relief from the weighty pronouncements of we pseudo-geniuses.

Your new cover design is a vast improvement but STARTLING STORIES got the best of the "new look". SS seems to be the favorite son these days. Shameful! STARTLING was my first stf

magazine and I am very fond of it, but still, think of the glory and tradition associated with WONDER. No other stf magazine has so *consistently* presented the best of contemporary science fiction. But to return to the subject of the cover: Couldn't you at least move the words "A Thrilling Publication" up to the top so the rest of the picture could be completely free of lettering? Put them above the "ND" in the title between "THRILLING" and the top of the "D" or stretch them out above "STORIES". Then since you have all the lettering at the top couldn't you put it against a solid colour background and drop a narrow border down one side or all around the picture. This still makes the cover layouts of SS and TWS distinctive from one another, which I presume is what you want. I understand that FANTASTIC STORY is going to have a *round* cover design (as well as go bimonthly). I can tell you I'm not going to like that (the design, not the new publishing schedule, which you may recall I requested). It's not that I'm making preconceived judgements or that I'm not open-minded. It's just that cover pictures should be rectangular and that's all there is to it. Oh, incidently the Emsh cover illustration for the August WONDER was quite good. The girl even had a face, instead of just a pleasing symmetry. She had other things, too. Could Ed (Emsh *is* Ed Emsler?) give me her radio-phone number? I'd like to contact her aerial.

Your editorial was rather non-controversial. I bet you're against sin, too . . . As an old Captain Future fan, I sympathize with the efforts of Henry Moskowitz (is he really Sam's grandson?) to have him revived in his own magazine. Heck, Sam, Thrilling is the biggest pulp publisher in the world. You publish all sorts of annuals and semi-annuals and irregulars as well as your many monthlies, bimonthlies, and quarterlies, couldn't you manage just to publish a trial issue of CF magazine and see if it would sell? . . . LIFE has muttered "there is a case for interplanetary saucers" all right, and the public believes. It would be sacrilegious not to. Rockets, atom bombs, *et al* have restored the world's faith in black magic but under the name of "Science". That's what has made science fiction so popular; that's why everything is "scientific" (or "magical") these days; that's why I saw a book of parlor magic tricks labeled "SCIENCE TRICKS". Maybe with a little stf under their belts, people will understand a little of cause and effect, and of free-thinking without blind acceptance. . . . I pity the shreds in which Bob Farnham will leave Moir . . . Not being Seibel (thank God!) I haven't had time to read the stories. The Hamilton and Vance look promising, but isn't PS more Bixby's speed? . . . More about FIND THE SCULPTOR, Sam. I sent some mags to Jerry Shelton with his stories, and FTS happened to be in one. Think one of your readers might have a copy for me *cheap?* Better still, write some better ones.—*427 East 8th Street, Mt. Carmel, Ill.*

H'm, capsule theology. Name calling sessions form line at the right. Geniuses at the end of the line.

So you think SS is getting preferential treatment? I don't know—I think the Emsh on the August cover was a striking job. And so far as stories go, TWS continues to get its share of the top stuff, said he modestly. Don't get your blood pressure up about any cover design. We're retaining the open mind and are perfectly willing to experiment. These three aren't the last word and we know it. They may improve yet.

Yep, Hank Moskowitz is Sam's grandson. He never could get a word in edgewise, so he moved to Three Bridges, where, like Demosthenes, he could practice speaking against the rush and rumble of three rivers flowing under three bridges. Who is this Captain Future he keeps writing me about?

VIVA LE DIFFERENCE

by Marion Cox

Dear Sam: After weeks of waiting as impatiently as I usually do, I was delighted to find the August TWS at my favorite newsstand. As I walked in, the owner breathed a sigh of relief and told me, "Okay, okay, it's finally come." Since he says that about every magazine, I had to see with my own eyes which one he meant. And there it was—good old TWS.

Hastily thumbing through the letter department for familiar names, I came upon a very familiar one. After a moment's thought I recognized it as my own. Thankee kindly, Sam. However, you made one small mistake. It won't be with our lily-white hands that we start out on this crusade. We plan to use that old gray matter you men refuse to believe we have.

And the crusade is already under way. Just you wait a few months and you'll see!

I'm delighted to see that CHOLWELL'S CHICKENS is in this issue. Can hardly wait to read it.

At least there *are* men on the cover. And they're no more weighted down by bulky clothes than the girl is, but that's about all you can say. Aw, come on, Sammy. You're being unfair to us poor gals. I dare say most of us enjoy the sight of a good-looking male as much as you enjoy the sight of a pretty girl. So, *when are we going to get some men on the cover?* That, in case you don't recognize it, is a threat. No men—no peace for poor ole Sam Mines. Amen.

Can any of you fans solve a deep, dark mystery for me? I've bought magazines in at least seven different states, but so far have never seen another fan buying one. What's the matter? Do you sneak out of the store with your magazines hidden carefully away somewhere? Are you afraid to be seen with them? When *I* buy a magazine of s-f, I carry it proudly in plain sight, show it to any friends who happen to be with me, and usually read it on the way home. Am I a braver character than other fans? Am I the only fan with courage enough to brave the curious stares of non-fans? In short, why don't you come out where I can see you!

There are fans in Sioux City, and there's no sense in hiding. I know you're there. The maga-

zine dealer say so. So come on. Drop me a card; call me up. Just let me know I'm not the only loud-mouthed fan around here. Please?

. And thanks to Virginia Winchester for her support.—*79th A.B. Sq., Sioux City, Iowa.*

Just now, in reading this letter, I got an idea for a cover which ought to make you drool—the femmes, I mean. Tell you more about it after I succeed in selling it to an artist. Meanwhile, a word . . .

ON THE SUBJECT
by Joe Gibson

Ah, Sam: Naturally, you're being praised for the new layout on this August TWS. And of course, your remark that the cover artist is now mentioned on the contents page solely for my benefit is hogwash—the day I can pull that much weight with any stf mag will be a sad day indeed.

But the Emsh girl, this ish, leads us directly to the crusade begun by the young ladies in our audience for masculine pulchritude on the covers. However this contest develops—with rockets and ray-guns or rickety strut-and-wire fighter planes or sabers and musketry or swords and clashing armor—methinks I wilst pitch my tent on yon hill o'erlooking the field and, divested of helm and mail and with weapons aside, puff a calm pipeful the while this thing shapes up. Are there any rascals despicable enough to challenge these maids? I hope so. 'Pon my word, it's becoming difficult to find a worthy villain to battle with, these days! (Are you there, Sire Vick?)

Still, Samuel, I can hardly appreciate your glib rejoinder to Miss Cox. Comparing the "average" knock-kneed, stoop-shouldered, hollow chested Man with Marilyn Monroe, indeed! Tho, one must admit, Miss Monroe hasn't too much of a Dag-rating—nonetheless, you knew as well as I that this wasn't what Miss Cox implied. Simply because you're no superman, and I'm no superman, doesn't mean we should object to this matter The issue is perfectly clear.

Take this bosomy Emsh gal, now. This sort've thing and Bergey's unsupported ladies and Schomburg's long-stemmed beauties give us guys a delightfully pleasant sensation. A nice stack of curves goes well anywhere. Now, are we to restrict this entertaining phenomenon to ourselves and leave the womenfolk in such ignorance of a well-developed masculine physique they must needs get their kicks from little mustaches? Seems to me, in due fairness, we should have equal portions of beautiful gal covers and muscular he-man covers, with no doubt an attractive blending of the two now and again.

And these, I believe, should have a proportionate exchange with space scenes, gadget covers, other-planet vistas, and BEMs. The BEMs are another matter. I thoroughly despise artists who depict BEMs as utter morons, ripping the clothes from some Earth girl. Any good BEM knows this only results in a fractured beak; and besides, it's more fun to rip clothes off a female BEM. Keep this in mind, sir.—*24 Kensington Ave., Jersey City 4, N.J.*

Joe, baby, you know not whereof you speak. Marilyn Monroe's Dag-rating is 37 according to recent advices, which admittedly falls somewhat short of Dag's publicized 42; nevertheless some of this 42 we regret to state appears to be avoirdupois, whereas an honest 37 is an admirable distance from hollow-chested. Let me add that this was no glib answer to Miss Cox. The point I was trying to make is that conditioning is all-important; that with a large enough advertising budget the public could be sold on the beauty of the average hollow-chested, knock-kneed man as securely as he now is on the sterling qualities of Miss America. But in consideration of your delicate nerves, the men going on the covers hereafter will be stalwart specimens as different from ye average man as a Bergey babe is from ye average gal. (Joe do you want to be a party to this monstrous mass deception?)

AND ALWAYS OOPSLA
by Gregg Calkins

Dear Sam; What an issue, what an issue! This mag has really got an editor! What mag? TWS, of course. But, don't get the idea that the whole issue was terrific. No. Because it wasn't. (At least—humbly—I don't think so.) But, it had enough good points, and the bad points weren't so bad.

Look at the cover, for instance. In TRS after my letter (you finally printed one) you give away the hint Bergey did it. Good thing you said, because no signature. (Yeah, now tell us how modest Earle is, again, and teach us to find the hidden signature.) But, he shoulda stood in bed. *I* can draw better rocketships than *that*, and the limits of my talent are painting midnight in a coal mine. But, strange as it may seem, I *can* see the point behind the cover. Should be for "BOMBS AWRY" shouldn't it? But, what a rocket ship they've got. If that's all a talented feller like Bergey can do. I'm going to take a drafting board to White Sands and offer *my* talents. One more minor (hah) point. *Why* does Earle paint the earth as a round, green globe with perfect symmetry and never leave a cloud in sight? I suggested he see the shots of earth in the great movie, "Destination: Moon." Clouds, there.

This business of three novelets in one issue isn't too good, from my standpoint, Sam, but you made up for it by the quality. The only thing I didn't care for in the longer bunch was Pratt's little "gem", and that's not so surprising, because I didn't like "DOUBLE JEOPARDY," either. On the debit side of the ledger, GO Smith's little bit was one of the best stories I've read since I began reading stf. His book, "Nomad," was a stinker, but he sure made up for it with this, and then some. Encore, encore!

And, when Murray Leinster dug out some more of his "JOURNEY TO BARKUT" style for "THE GADGET HAD A GHOST" I just went

wild. No better can be found. The more you can get from Leinster along this line, the better I'll like it. Of course, the first story was in SS, but that doesn't matter here. Two great novelets and one straggler, which doubtless everyone else liked but me.

And the short stories! *Never* have I seen comparable short stories in the pages of SS-TWS. "PAPA KNOWS BEST" was terrific, closely followed by "SUCH AN ANGEL." Great! I never would have believed you could pick them like that, Sam, if someone had told me aforehand. Now I'm telling everyone else. However, the success must have gone to your head, because to wind it up you picked out "THE FOXHOLES OF MARS" while still wearing your rose-colored glasses. You shoulda looked twice, Sam. But, the first two win your stripes, so we'll forget the other. Ok?

"Science Fiction Book Review", "What's New In Science", and Blish's article I pass with a nod. Readable, but not exceptional, altho the first one mentioned was a little better than usual. But the "Frying Pan" I have only harsh words for. Bixby should get his little green fingers spanked with a ten-ton ruler. What does he think he's doing, there, anyhow? He doesn't have any fanzines to review, mebbeso? Well, I've sent him three, now, and if he doesn't review one soon you'll be getting a package in the mail that goes "tick, tick, tick." Doggone it, I want a review for OOPS! To top it all off, by the time he does review one, it'll be my first issue, and that was a mess, while the fifth is probably out. Doggone!

THE READER SPEAKS. I've been saving the best for last. Sure is nice how you can build a good letter column, slap a story or two around it for bulk, and sell it for 25¢, isn't it? Nice. Only thing wrong in this column is the part ahead of the letters. Yeah. Mighads, Sam, you don't have to try and beat JWC Jr. out of business with your editorials. Forget him and write a light, funny editorial for once. Oh, I always struggle through it with you, but believe me, it's a struggle. For both sides, too, I imagine. Smile, boy, smile. Get a good yak in your heart and then write the editorial. (Science, the boy talks about, yet.)

In the letters, we come to the part of Shelby Vick. He mentions, very shortly, the Walt Willis campaign. Let me enlarge a moment. There is now a full-scale campaign to bring fandom's best humorist and writer to the Chicago convention from Ireland. But, it takes money. So, some doughnations are needed. In support of this campaign, certain fanzines are publishing issues selling for 25c (myself included) the proceeds of which are to go to the WAW fund. All of fandom's support is needed, Sam, even yours. OOPSLA! #5 (from this address) will be the "Walt Willish" and will sell for 25¢. It will have material by Shelby Vick, Walt Willis himself, Lee Hoffman and others; all about Walt Willis but of interest to every red-blooded fan. Is a quarter too much? I don't think so. And, for larger doughnations, a $750 (when new) electric mimeograph is being given away! It has EVERYTHING, Sam, EVERYTHING. Automatic this, automatic that, and automatic rest of everything. And it's being given away to the lucky raffle winner. That's for larger doughnations directly to Vick, Box 493, Lynn Haven, Florida. If you can't support the campaign that way, tho, you can send your quarter in support, and receive a *big* issue of the "Walt Willish" besides. Support it, what can you lose? (Send *your* doughnation yet, Sam? How about *you*, Bixby?)

And, Sam, if you decide not to print all of my letter, please stick in the above paragraph, at least, will you? Doggone it, we need the support. And many thanks. I guess I'll take my leave here to await "Dragon's Island" in SS, "Slan" in FSM and "Lords of The Morning" in the next TWS.

"WAW with the crew in '52", and, "Walt's the bhoy for Illinois".—*761 Oakley Street, Salt Lake City, Utah.*

Gregg boy, look. Nobody will believe I'm not *paying* you for these letters. Of course it's all too true. . . .

Stop weeping. You've got your review of OOPSLA by now. Wish you'd stood in bed? I'm telling Bixby to open no packages addressed to him for the next month.

In regard to the last part of your letter: As this column is being prepared, a letter from Hank Moskowitz tells me of a postcard he received saying that Walter Willis died on May 15th. We have no way of checking immediately on the veracity of the card, so will give it no undue publicity. By the time this sees print you will all know whether it is true or not anyway. Let's hope it's not. Checked—it's a hoax.

HELP WANTED

by Mrs. Harry Tinstman

Dear Sir: I have been a science fiction enthusiast for many years—since I was a teen-ager hero-worshipping the "big Brother" who wrote science fiction stories.

My brother, Warren E. Sanders, wrote a story which was published in WONDER STORIES sometime between 1930 and 1932. I have been trying, unsuccessfully, to obtain a copy of the issue in which this story appeared, not for myself, but for the 12 year old son of the author, who, unfortunately, lost or had stolen all his copies, as well as his original manuscript copy.

Space Cadet Sanders is his Dad's own boy—reads science fiction, charts the heavens, and roams the space lanes daily. Incidentally, the kid-sister hero worship I felt is nothing compared to what he feels for his Dad; and nothing would make him happier than to have, for his very own, the magazine containing his father's story.

Mr. Sanders also wrote some stories for AMAZING STORIES between 1930 and 1934; I have written to them also. But I had a wonderful idea (I hope) while I was reading the WONDER STORIES ANNUAL. Since reprints of stories from all the good SF Mags appear in this ANNUAL, it occurred to me that you, more than anyone else, might be able to find these issues.

Anyway, here is the data, and I'll be keeping my fingers crossed.

THE STERILE WORLD—Warren E. Sanders —1930-31 WONDER STORIES.

SHERIDAN BECOMES AMBASSADOR—1931-32—AMAZING STORIES

A Sequel to "SHERIDAN"—1932-33—AMAZING STORIES

Any response or advice will be very sincerely appreciated not only by this writer, but also by "Space Cadet Sanders".—*1051 Chapman, San Jose, California.*

As already reported to Mrs. Tinstman, THE STERILE WORLD appeared in WONDER STORIES QUARTERLY for Spring 1932. The others we do not know, but are confident the fans can help. Thanks for your confidence in us.

CREAMPUFFS AT FIFTY PACES

by Earl T. Parris

Dear Ed: I'm very sorry that at the moment there is no typewriter available. I hope this will see print for the benefit of a—er—person whose identity will be disclosed in just a moment.

First though I want to thank you for a very good June issue. I really enjoyed McGregor's SUCH AN ANGEL. But since putting out a good mag seems to be your S.O.P. (Standard Operating Procedure) I need say no more.

The rest of this missive concerns a certain Shelby Vick. I've been patiently reading of this argument concerning beautiful girls in fandom but my patience is at an end. Mr. Vick, can you give a clear, concise definition of beauty? Be rather hard to do since beauty is largely a matter of opinion. And you must really get around because obviously you've met all of the lady fans to know there are no beautiful ones.

I have in mind a certain young lady with whom I've been corresponding for quite a while. In my opinion this lady is beautiful, not only physically, but in personality too. If you care to argue this point, I'll be only too happy to try to straighten you out—vertically or horizontally, whichever you prefer. Or we can act like gentlemen and have a duel at dawn. Creampuffs at fifty paces.

Seriously though, this whole argument is senseless. You have no evidence and there are some people sensitive enough to be hurt by your uncomplimentary remarks. So let's knock it off, huh? Arguments are okay, but there are extremes.—*Svc. Co. 196th RCT, A.P.O. 949, c/o Postmaster, Seattle, Wash.*

Being relatively new at this game, we have yet to meet any lady fans, beautiful or otherwise. 'Course Joe Gibson insists there are beautiful ones, even as Shelby Vick maintains that the beautiful ones are interested in other things. We'll sit this one out.

SEIBEL FOREVER

by Ed The Snarler

Dear Shock: A while before I commenced writing this letter I was ambling around the house, hands in pockets and grinning to myself. I just so happened to pass another inmate of Seibel Manor while thus grinning and was asked as to why in the Blue Boots of Bootes was I going around grinning in such a frightening, horrible manner? I replied that I was about to start my latest letter to you.

And here I am, as you can well see; a little late this month perhaps, but no doubt I'm well within the deadline for letters that will be published. And you'll publish it naturally—why is a matter of conjecture on my part. According to you I'm a very irritating factor in your life—you said so yourself when you said our arguments are likened to "five o'clock shadows;" they itch to high Arcturus. But maybe you're just as batty as I am. Yurp, yurp, urp!

Well, I see you have a cover on your magazine this month; I assume that it illustrates a scene from George O. Smith's *Bombs Awry*. Which means—gasping alligators!—that an innovation has sneaked in! Batten down the hatches! Close all doors! Do something! A new idea! Etc. . . . !

I can't say there's much to scream, rant and rave about this month, Shock old man (You must be an old man if Bix can trample you in his rush to buy in. Come to think of it, if you get mad at Bix, just tell all the fans he doesn't exist, that Bix is a pseudonym of yours—and Bix will just . . . vanish.); you seem to have made a fair selection of stories, with Smith's *Bombs Awry* topping the list. It held my attention all the way through—and that ending left me gurgling with amusement. Smith may not be a good writer in a number of ways, but what he does have proficiency in, he uses and uses well.

What do you know—for once in a long time now Leinster has written a story that I read with a modicum of interest; this is naturally in reference to his story in this June ish of TWS *The Gadget Had a Ghost*. It was at least entertaining.

While I'm still thinking about it, I just happened to read Tuning's letter in this issue too, commenting on various pseudonyms and their owners. I see he thinks that Liddell is a pseudo for Kuttner, which is not true; Liddell happens to be a pseudo for Leinster. And come to mention it, Kuttner's real name isn't Kuttner at all, or else my copy of *Other Worlds* (a book) is one big liar. I don't think it is, nor do I think that the book which said Vance is a pseudo for Kuttner is a liar either; after all, the persons who put together that particular little book should be well aware of who is whom in science-fiction. What I got a big laugh out of was these joes who directed a hate campaign against Vance and in the same breath so to speak lauded Kuttner to the skies. Ah well, this business of ferreting out sneaky authors is of no interest to me, not really.

Sam, you are in for it. After I finish writing this magnificent, interesting, scintillating letter to you (I'm writing this letter and I've a right to boost my ego and put in a little propaganda in my favor) I'm going to start writing a story to send to you. And do you know where I got my inspiration? From a nightmare I had last night, no less! You may not believe this, but it's true. Last night I had a terrific science-fiction nit-, I mean, nightmare (typewriter slipped). It was the most bizarre science-fiction I have ever had the good fortune to conjure up in my magnificent mind; it was really unusual. And YOU are going to be the fortunate recipient of this milestone in science-fiction. I have bare doubts that you will not buy it.

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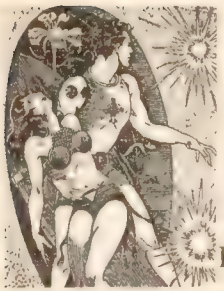

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By HENRY KUTTNER

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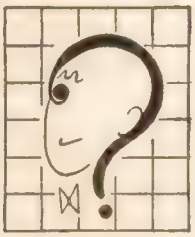

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I read your editorial, and—What? (A pause for station identification . . .) Gassp! Did you ever bother to integrate yourself into one system of thought? You are a living bag of contradictions. In one editorial you deplore science in science-fiction, then in perhaps the next one or so you begin to wonder why s-f fans decry s-f as literature utterly improbable, when all the scientific advances point toward just what is being written in certain s-f magazines today.

Anyhow, I sort of liked this editorial and you have a sense of humor I've found out, so I'll not be harsh with you, boy.

I'd like to bother you more Sam, but I suspect I would be wasting good paper—that most of what I wrote would be cut before publication. I'm keeping myself down to a limit, therefore. To get more than my foot in the door, I suppose I'll have to write that story, so I'm going to stop here and start on the story.

He walks by night,
But has no light,
In morning a tower he hangs,
The shape is black,
But has no fangs.

—Box 445, Olivehurst, Cal.

You know, if I had a little spare time I'd worry about you. That once magnificent photographic memory is a pale shambles of its former kinetic self. Snarly, you're starting to remember stuff that isn't there. Like my deploring science in an editorial. Go back and read it again. Stop jumping up and down! Sit down quietly and relax. Down, boy.

You know even Tuning has got to be right sometimes. Liddell really is Kuttner. Who told you he was Leinster? As for Vance—well, I had lunch the other day with Jack Vance and his wife and I can personally vouch for the fact that he would make at least two of Kuttner, who is slim and gentle, while Vance is big, husky and outdoorsy.

Regarding the story you are threatening to write—hah, I have taken measures to protect myself. I have notified the postmaster that all mail from California will be refused and I have hired two mailsnickers (a Martian insect which lives on registered mail). I have let these mailsnickers get a sniff of your latest letter. With this incredible scent reeling in their nostrils they will be turned loose in the New York General Postoffice, to which they will cling like leeches, sniffing each letter and package as it comes through. The moment they spot one with the tell-tale scent—did you ever see a locust plague in a lettuce patch?

So—as it always does, time runs out. Have fun and we'll see you all right back here in the next ish. *—The Editor*

The FRYING PAN

A Commentary on Fandom

ATTENTION, Bill Tuning & Snarly: Had a visitor to our offices the other day. Just returned from a year in sunny Italy. Real nice guy, with the prettiest little wife you ever saw. Darned good writer, too. Name of Jack Vance.

He doesn't even *look* like Kuttner.

* * *

Bob Kessler writes to inform us that a new fanclub has sprung from the fertile soil of the San Fernando Valley. Its name: Infinity. All teen-age fans in the vicinity who'd like to join are encouraged to write to Infinity, 8042 Vantage Avenue, North Hollywood, California.

Have fun.

* * *

Fanzine folks are funny folks,
For this is how it goes—
They put nudes in their fanzines,
Object to nudes in pros.
Mimi O. Graff

Concerning which we had a bit of a hassle a while back . . . at the last Fan-Vet convention, and a friendly sort of hassle. During a question-and-answer period (a bunch of us editors were cornered up on the platform), a fan inquired: "Why do you run sexy babes on the covers? The fans don't need that stuff to buy the magazines." To which yours truly got up and replied that it was because the fans as such constitute a whopping two per cent of the readership of the average science fiction magazine, and the other ninety-eight per cent has to be

[*Turn page*]

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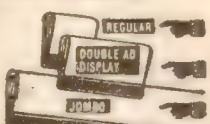

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Oh, stop *screaming!*

You dyed-in-the-wool fans are our favorite and most gratifying audience, and we luff you anyway . . . just don't mind us if once in a while we nudge your hot little hands off the helm.

* * *

Take a look around your newsstands, and you'll see (and buy, yes?) Standard's new stf magazine SPACE STORIES . . . which, as the title implies, specializes in colorful, fast-moving adventures in Space and Time.

Good ones.

And get a load of that cover by Emsh!

* * *

Attended a rehearsal of TALES OF TOMORROW last Friday, to see what goes on behind the scenes in TV . . . thought we might try a script for them. Wandered all over the set, gawped at gimmicks, congratulated Victor Jory on his years-ago performance in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* which still sticks vividly in our mind, and then saw the lovely little blonde H-bomb who co-starred with Vic. . . .

Sl-l-l-*lurp!*

Talked a blue streak. Inflated our chest and tried to look influential. Made no impression whatsoever. Weren't encouraged to ask for telephone number. Still don't quite know what a TV rehearsal looks like.

* * *

We'd like to add our two cents to the eternal quest for a good definition of science fiction. The definition is Ted Sturgeon's, however, not ours; we're just passing it on. Fan-authors might note:

"A science fiction story should be a story of human beings, with human problems, which are solved in terms of human relations, in a setting which could not occur except for the science angle."

* * *

We've had the pleasure, in the past few months, of seeing several guys we've known ten years or more suddenly perk up and take an interest in science fiction. Back in the old days when we were all learning how to write bad counterpoint together, these two boys—a pianist and cellist respectively—repeatedly threatened to bounce their instruments off our head for reading such "juvenile Buck Rogers stuff." Did it have real guts, like Wolfe? Real writing, like Mann? Real insight, like Dostoievsky? Real people, like de Maupassant?

Sometimes yes, they have discovered . . . and it often has real value, like science fiction.

* * *

Speaking of relativity: "A sadist is one who is kind to a masochist."

Courtesy H. L. Gold

* * *

As you read this, it's about two weeks to the Chicago convention . . . see you there?

—JEROME BIXBY

Featured Next Issue

THE CAPHIAN CAPER

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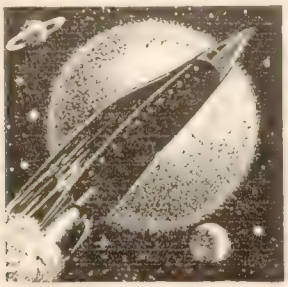
By KENDELL FOSTER CROSSEN

Science Fiction
BOOK REVIEW

FIVE SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS, compiled by Martin Greenberg, Gnome Press, Inc., New York, 382 pages, $3.50.

FIVE short novels from the pages of ASF make up this volume, emphasizing a movement we applauded with Doubleday's publication of the two short Fletcher Pratt novels DOUBLE IN SPACE earlier this year. With reading fans consistently showing favoritism towards longer stories, it seemed odd that anthologies customarily included only shorts.



It was high time someone began to dig into the gold mine of available novelets.

The collection gathered here by Marty Greenberg, though hardly inclusive, or even representative, indicates in a fair way the growth of science fiction in the past twelve years or so, even the development of ASF. The lead-off story, for example, BUT WITHOUT HORNS, by Norvell W. Page, originally published in 1939, would hardly get to first base today. The writing is relatively crude, the plot a simple and spun out affair of a superman threatening the world, the histrionics flambouyant and purple.

By contrast, DESTINY TIMES THREE by Fritz Leiber, published in 1945, is a smooth and polished piece of work, very effective visually, and already showing the beginnings of that intricate web-work of construction and cerebral detachment which became the virtual trademark of the magazine. It is a rather grim tale of parallel worlds, two of which are distorted and neurotic and out to ruin the third—ours.

CRISIS IN UTOPIA by Norman L. Knight,

[*Turn page*]

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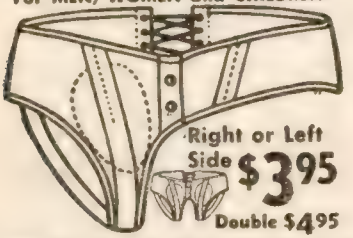

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circa 1940, is again relatively superficial compared to the later stories—a tale of mutants hiding in the South Pacific. The same is generally true of THE CRUCIBLE OF POWER by Jack Williamson, from 1939, though the writing here is generally more terse and less extravagant, with a good deal of the reportorial quality so often noted in the better pulp adventure stories of fifteen years ago.

THE CHRONICLER by A. E. van Vogt is without doubt the most readable story in the book. Though it dates from 1946, making it comparatively recent, it bears no mark of his later obfuscation, but is a straightforward narrative, clear, direct, dramatic. The plot concerns a more or less ordinary man who discovers, via auto accident, that he has a third eye, right in the middle of his forehead, and moreover that this third eye can see a world which did not exist to the other two. He is instantly embroiled in a mad intrigue of this other world—not too convincing a world. But it's a good fantastic adventure.

THE ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION ANTHOLOGY, edited by John W. Campbell Jr., Simon & Schuster, Inc., New York, 585 pp. $3.95.

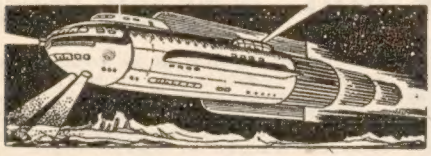
PUBLICATION of a definitive anthology from the pages of "Astounding" is a milestone, for, as the publisher's blurb properly points out, no man did more to help science fiction grow out of its swaddling clothes than John Campbell. His insistence upon ideas as opposed to pulp action forced the entire level of writing upward. The contents page reads like a veritable "Who's Who" of science fiction authors: Robert Heinlein, Jack Williamson van Vogt, L. Sprague de Camp, Isaac Asimov, Lewis Padgett, Lawrence O'Donnell, John Pierce, Murray Leinster, Eric Frank Russell, T. L. Sherred, William Tenn, Theodore Sturgeon, Kris Neville, Clifford Simak, Lester del Rey, H. Beam Piper and H. B. Fyfe.

These are mostly the "old guard". Not a single woman writer is represented, nor any of the new crop whose experimental work today is fully as important as these first intellectual gropings out of the Buck Rogers action pattern. This anthology marks a period as exactly as it bounds a collection. It illustrates the rise of the cold, dry cerebral story, never very easy to read, whose joys were the joys of solving an intellectual puzzle, frequently made more difficult by an intentionally abstruse style. It was the cerebral quality which awed most science fiction readers, but it was this same quality

which made it, for most readers, difficult to take except in small doses. It was relatively tiring to read.

In BLOWUPS HAPPEN by Robert Heinlein, the story which opens the book, Heinlein's impressive ability to marshall technical details is used to flood the reader's senses with such an array of technical images that he is convinced despite himself that this is really happening. The result is very impressive, but exhausting. Jack Williamson's story HINDSIGHT, comes a little closer to expressing emotion, but not very, for Campbell seems to have shied away from emotion as from contagion. Even the stories written for him by Henry Kuttner and published under the Lewis Padgett byline are strikingly different from those published under the name of Kuttner. The latter are warm, fanciful, joyish, Puckish. Under the Padgett byline they are brittle, cold, shining with the light of the pure intellect, but with all warmth excised.

Though a new revolution is now taking place in science fiction, it in no way reduces the importance of this anthology which typifies the first big change. Whatever our ultimate ideas on the destiny of science fiction, we all owe a large debt to John Campbell.



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— Continued from Other Side

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